



Foundation Document Overview

Navajo National Monument

Arizona



Contact Information

For more information about the *Navajo National Monument Foundation Document*, contact: nava_superintendent@nps.gov or (928) 672-2700 or write to: Superintendent, Navajo National Monument, P.O. Box 7717, Shonto, AZ 86045

Purpose



NAVAJO NATIONAL MONUMENT, in the rugged Tsegi Canyon system of northeastern Arizona, protects and preserves ancient cliff dwellings, associated resources, and surrounding environments that contribute to appreciation and understanding of the Ancestral Puebloan peoples who built the dwellings and inhabited the remote canyons.



Significance

Significance statements express why Navajo 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.

- Betatakin, Keet Seel, and Inscription House are among the best preserved Puebloan period cliff dwellings in the southwestern United States. These remarkably intact 13th century structural complexes were constructed in recessed alcoves in sandstone cliff walls that provided shelter and protection. Well-preserved archeological and cultural material associated with these sites further contributes far-reaching insights into the lifeways of the Ancestral Puebloan people.
- Journeying through Navajo National Monument's remote and rugged landscape provides visitors an unparalleled opportunity to envision the past. The limited extent of modern intrusions and conveniences at the monument, and the effort required to visit the sites of Betatakin and Keet Seel, heighten the appreciation of visitors for the challenges faced by ancestral communities to develop and occupy these remote places in a high desert environment.
- The descendants of those who built and occupied the cliff dwellings and surrounding region continue to maintain strong traditional and spiritual connections to the resources and cultural landscape of Navajo National Monument. The monument's cultural and natural resources are central to the distinctive beliefs and practices of the modern Hopi, Zuni, Navajo, and San Juan Southern Paiute. Multiple generations of associated communities and families have helped protect monument resources and continue to play key stewardship roles in preserving these important places for the appreciation and education of future generations.
- Betatakin/Talastima Canyon shelters a lush, relic aspen/fir forest that sustains habitat for a diverse array of plant and animal species, including the endangered Mexican spotted owl. The forest ecosystem, seemingly incongruous in the surrounding desert environment, a unique feature of the area, and its existence reinforces the enduring centuries-old connection between the monument's natural and cultural resources.

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.

- **Cliff Dwellings**
 - **Betatakin**
 - **Keet Seel**
 - **Inscription House**
 - **Other Precontact Sites**
- **Museum Collections and Artifacts**
- **Cultural Landscape**
- **Continuing Cultural Connections**
- **Power of Place**

Navajo 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 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.

- Navajo National Monument's spectacular cliff dwellings and unique habitats, embedded in a vast and remote natural landscape, inspire contemplation of our connection to the land—an increasingly rare experience.
- Navajo National Monument's well-preserved cliff dwellings and artifacts attest to the social complexity of 13th-century pueblo life and offer opportunities to explore cultural continuity and change.
- The connection of contemporary Navajo and San Juan Southern Paiute people and Zuni, Hopi, and other Pueblo nations to this place demonstrates the ongoing value of story, tradition, and place in human culture.



Description

Navajo National Monument is in northeastern Arizona along a main route between the Four Corners area and the Grand Canyon. The monument is in the heart of the western part of the Navajo Reservation and is surrounded by lands belonging to the Navajo Nation.

The monument is largely known for its three cliff dwelling complexes. The cliff dwellings and other important resources of the monument are in Tsegi Canyon, a primary drainage of the eastern part of the Shonto Plateau. The canyon has three major branches and numerous side branches, all of which deeply cut into the Navajo sandstone that characterizes the area.

Although archeological evidence is limited, the area of the Colorado Plateau that includes today's Navajo National Monument was inhabited by small nomadic bands of Archaic Period hunters and gatherers from as early as 6000 BC and possibly earlier.

The three primary cliff dwellings at Navajo National Monument (Betatakin, Keet Seel, and Inscription House) were constructed by Ancestral Puebloan people during the final (Tsegi) phase of the Pueblo III Period (approximately AD 1250 to 1300). These sites are considered among the largest and most intact precontact structures in the southwestern United States. Various proportions of masonry and jacal walls were used in the construction of living quarters, storage rooms, ceremonial kivas, and other structural features. The large pueblo complexes were developed in sheltered alcoves along the sides of the sandstone walls of the Tsegi Canyon system. These sheltered conditions have contributed to the remarkable preservation of the sites and their associated cultural materials and artifacts.

The cliff dwellings and Tsegi Canyon represent a significant part of the long span of human habitation of the area. Some 700 years after the departure of the Ancestral Pueblos, the places and stories associated with their presence continue to hold profound cultural importance and meaning for contemporary people, particularly the Hopi, Zuni, Navajo, and San Juan Southern Paiute.

In addition to the Betatakin cliff dwelling site, the monument's main unit includes an area of land on the rim of Betatakin Canyon used for NPS administrative and visitor use purposes under an agreement with the Navajo Nation. The visitor center provides information services, exhibits, videos, and sales items. The Navajo Arts and Crafts Enterprise operates a gift shop specializing in Navajo silverwork. The headquarters area also includes trails, overlooks, campground, picnic area, and administrative facilities. The Betatakin cliff dwelling is visible from the rim overlook, and visitors can access the site by taking a 5-mile-roundtrip guided hike into the canyon. The Keet Seel unit is 8 miles northeast of the headquarters area, and visitors generally must backpack and camp overnight to visit it. The campground near Keet Seel and parts of the access trail are on Navajo Nation land outside the boundary of the monument. Inscription House in Nitsin Canyon, more than 30 miles by road from the headquarters area, has been closed to visitors since 1968 to protect the fragile and unstable site. Visitors to Navajo National Monument currently number about 66,000 per year, and more than 95% of visitors stay on the rim at the headquarters area, within viewing distance of the Betatakin cliff dwelling.

