



# Foundation Document Overview

## Yosemite National Park

California



### Contact Information

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## Park Description

Through a rich history of conservation, the spectacular natural and cultural features of Yosemite National Park have been protected over time. The conservation ethics and policies rooted at Yosemite National Park were central to the development of the national park idea. First, Galen Clark and others lobbied to protect Yosemite Valley from development, ultimately leading to President Abraham Lincoln's signing the Yosemite Grant in 1864. The Yosemite Grant granted the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove of Big Trees to the State of California stipulating that these lands "be held for public use, resort, and recreation. . . inalienable for all time." Later, John Muir led a successful movement to establish a larger national park encompassing not just Yosemite Valley, but surrounding mountains and forests as well—paving the way for the United States national park system. As a result of these efforts, Congress designated Yosemite National Park in 1890. This act, however, excluded Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, leaving them under state jurisdiction. The legislature of California receded Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees to the United States in 1905. Congress accepted the state grant in 1906 and added these lands to Yosemite National Park.

Yosemite National Park covers an area of 747,956 acres along the central western slopes of the Sierra Nevada mountain range in east-central California. Designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site in 1984, Yosemite is internationally recognized for its spectacular granite cliffs, waterfalls, clear streams, giant sequoia groves, and biological diversity. More than 94% of the park is designated wilderness and 135 miles of the Tuolumne and Merced Rivers have been designated as part of the national wild and scenic rivers system.

Yosemite contains one of the largest and least fragmented habitat blocks in the Sierra Nevada, and the park supports a diversity of plants and animals. The park's almost 11,000 feet of vertical gradient support five major vegetation zones: chaparral/oak woodland, lower montane forest, upper montane forest, subalpine zone, and alpine. Of California's 7,000 plant species, more than 1,400 species exist within Yosemite. There is suitable habitat for more than 160 rare plants in the park, with rare local geologic formations and unique soils characterizing the restricted range of many of these plants.

The geology of the Yosemite area is characterized by granitic rocks and remnants of older rock. About 10 million years ago, the Sierra Nevada was uplifted and then tilted to form its relatively gentle western slopes and the more dramatic eastern slopes. The uplift increased the steepness of stream and river beds, resulting in formation of deep, narrow canyons. About 1 million years ago, snow and ice accumulated, forming glaciers at the high elevations that moved down the river valleys. Ice thickness in Yosemite Valley may have reached 4,000 feet during the early glacial episode. The downslope movement of the ice masses cut and sculpted the U-shaped valley that attracts so many visitors to its scenic vistas today.

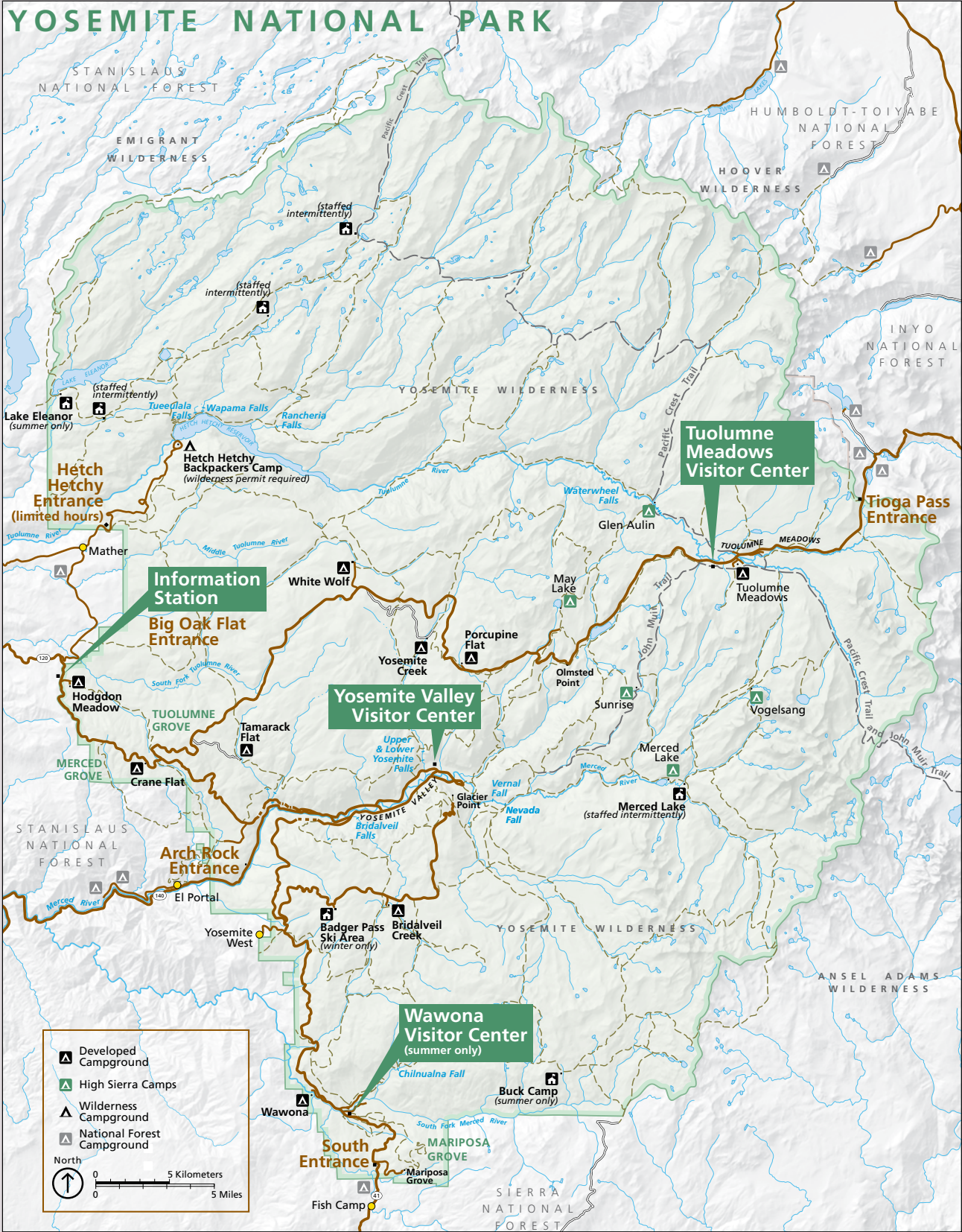
Within Yosemite's history, various populations thrived and left their mark. The Ahwahneechee lived here for generations, followed by the arrival of Europeans in the mid-1800s. The rugged terrain challenged many early European travelers, with just a few—only 650 from the mid-1850s to mid-1860s—making the journey to Yosemite Valley by horseback or stage. Many of these early white settlers hosted writers, artists, and photographers who spread the fame of "the Incomparable Valley" throughout the world. By 1907, construction of the Yosemite Valley Railroad from Merced to El Portal eased the journey, thereby increasing visitation.

Today, more than 4 million people enter the park's gates each year to explore Yosemite: most spend the majority of their time in the seven square miles of Yosemite Valley. Popular visitor activities include hiking and backpacking, camping, fishing, biking, horseback riding, picnicking, rock climbing, auto touring, wildlife watching, and winter sports. In 2015, visitors to the park spent more than \$449.1 million in communities surrounding the park, which helps support more than 6,000 jobs in the local area.





# Park Map

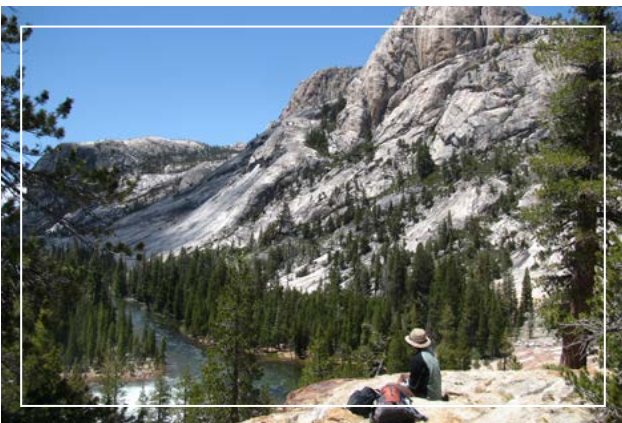




## Purpose



*The purpose of YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK is to preserve the dynamic natural setting within the park's boundaries, including soaring granite domes, dramatic cliffs, towering waterfalls, ancient sequoia groves, expansive wilderness terrain, and free-flowing wild and scenic rivers; to celebrate the cultural and historic traditions of the Central Sierra Nevada, including thousands of years of human history; to perpetuate the American conservation ethic; and to provide opportunities for scientific exploration, recreation, education, and inspiration for generations to come.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Yosemite National 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.

- The park is noted for its outstanding scenery—including peaks, canyons, cliffs, domes, rivers, lakes, immense waterfalls, lush green meadows, wildlife, and forests.
- Yosemite National Park contains a unique assemblage of massive granite domes and glacial features, which resulted from a rich geologic history. Several of the largest exposed granite monoliths on earth are in Yosemite Valley.
- In connection with its neighboring national parks and forests, Yosemite National Park is at the heart of the second largest contiguous area of designated wilderness in the lower 48 states, protecting nearly 2.5 million acres.
- Within the park boundary, Yosemite possesses extensive blocks of intact old growth forests, including three groves of giant sequoia trees—the first to be protected by law—as well as some of the largest known specimens of several tree species.
- Yosemite National Park contains extensive reaches of two designated wild and scenic rivers—the Tuolumne and the Merced—which are preserved within the park. In addition to their free-flowing condition and exceptionally high water quality, both rivers have a suite of outstandingly remarkable values that are of geological, cultural, scenic, and recreational importance.



# Significance

- Yosemite National Park includes the headwaters of two of California's major watersheds, which provide clean drinking water to millions of people in the San Francisco Bay Area, and a valuable source of water to the robust agricultural industry in California's Central Valley. The forests and meadows of these watersheds enhance ecological resilience to help offset the impacts of climate change.
- Alpine and sub-alpine lakes and meadows abound in Yosemite National Park, including Tuolumne Meadows—one of the most accessible and largest intact subalpine meadow complexes in the Sierra Nevada.
- Yosemite National Park is a vital living research laboratory, a sanctuary, and an example of a relatively pristine natural environment. This is of special significance in California, a state with a rapidly growing population of more than 35 million people.
- The vast landscape of Yosemite National Park provides refuge for the survival and recovery of many rare, endemic, and threatened or endangered species. The park is home to an exceptional diversity of living things, fostered by a broad elevation range and the sequence of climatic zones contained within its boundaries.
- Land preserved within Yosemite National Park is part of the ancestral homeland of several contemporary American Indian tribes and groups. Oral tradition and archeological evidence suggest humans have been living continuously in the Yosemite region for at least 8,000 years.
- Yosemite National Park has the distinction of being the first scenic natural area to be set aside by the United States for public benefit and appreciation of landscape beauty. Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove were the 1864 birthplace of the national park idea, which has spread throughout the world.



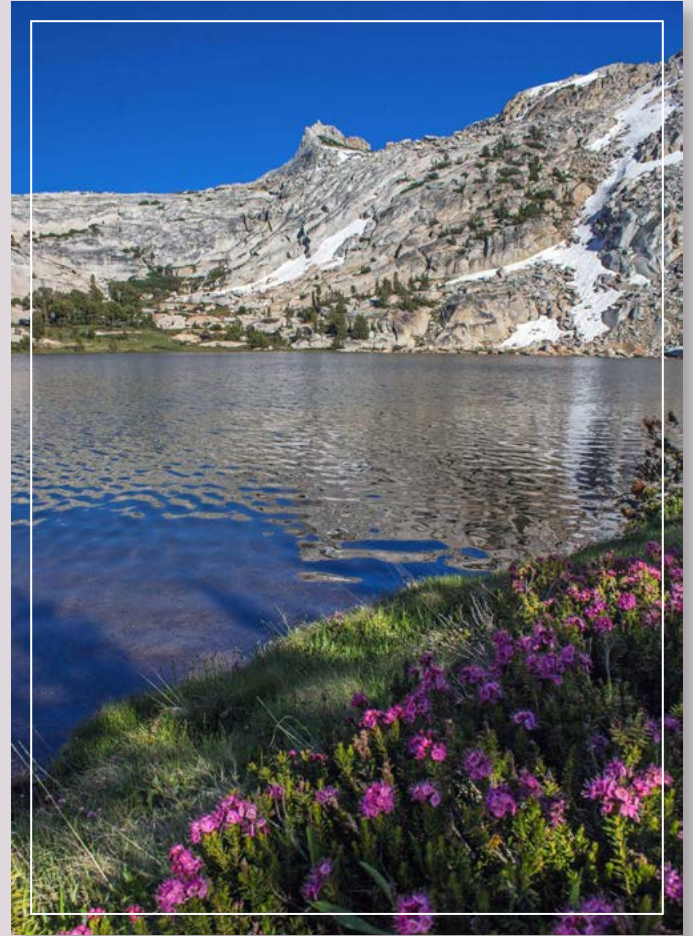
- Yosemite National Park has international recognition for its past and present role as a leader in park preservation, management, and partnerships. Important elements include the role of the U.S. Army (including Buffalo Soldiers), the first female ranger (1917), the formal institution of interpretation (1920), participation in the evolution of 150 years of public-use management, the first wildlife management program in the National Park Service as inspired by George Wright (late 1920s), and the establishment of the first nonprofit stewardship partners in the National Park Service (1923).
- Yosemite National Park was the home of the first NPS landscape design office providing design services for all parks in the West. As such, the park represents the birthplace of the National Park Service Rustic Style of architecture and numerous important historic structures. Within the park, 5 structures are national historic landmarks, and more than 600 are considered eligible for listing or are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including 7 historic and 12 prehistoric archeological districts.
- The decision-making and stewardship actions taken at Yosemite National Park inspire an international audience and influence stakeholders, policy makers, and communities worldwide. The park has a distinction as a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site, which demonstrates its outstanding universal value.
- Within Yosemite National Park both the Yosemite Valley and Camp 4 have played a significant role in the history of big wall climbing and the development of climbing techniques and equipment, which have since gained worldwide acceptance.



# Fundamental Resources and Values

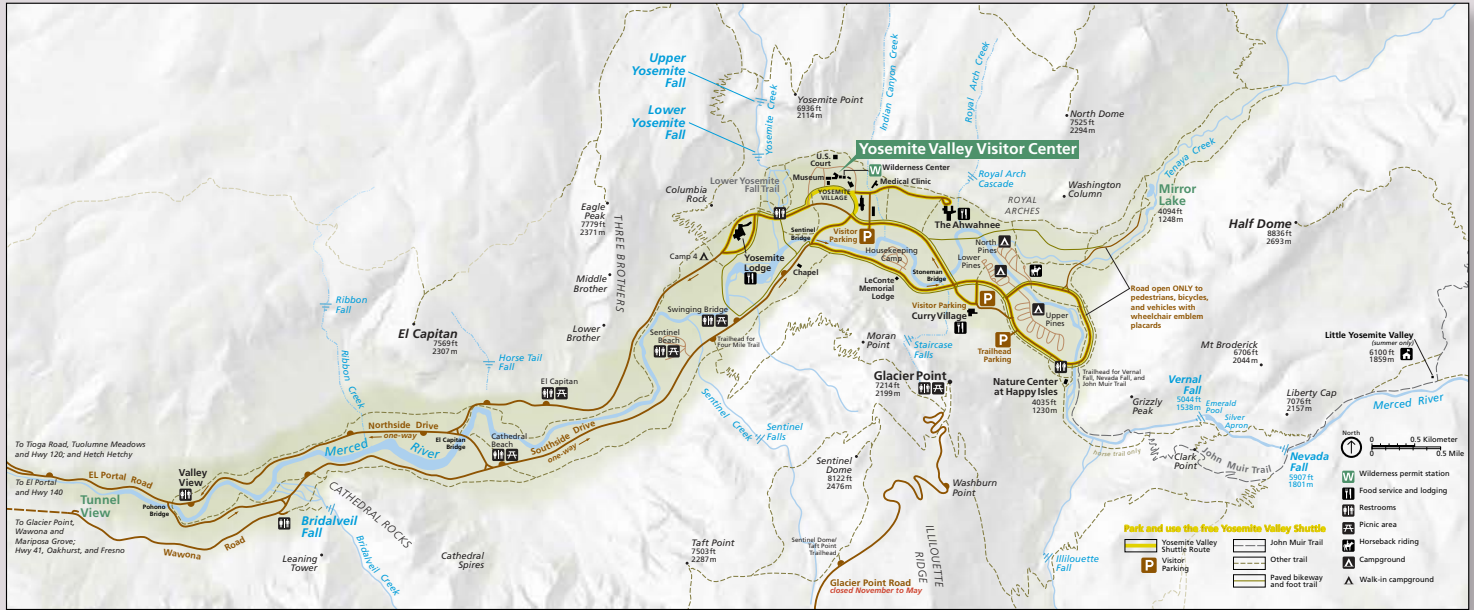
Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Unique Geologic Landscapes.** Yosemite is a glaciated landscape, and the scenery that resulted from the interaction of the glaciers and the underlying granitic rocks was the basis for its preservation as a national park. Iconic landmarks such as Yosemite Valley, Hetch Hetchy, Yosemite Falls, Vernal and Nevada Falls, Bridalveil Falls, Half Dome, El Capitan, the Clark Range, and the Cathedral Range are known throughout the world by the photographs and paintings of countless artists, both amateur and professional. Landforms resulting from glaciation include U-shaped valleys, jagged peaks, rounded domes, waterfalls, lakes, moraines, and granite spires. Glacially polished granite is further evidence of glaciation, and is common in Yosemite National Park.
- **Dramatic and Inspirational Scenery.** The spectacular scenic features of Yosemite, where the high concentration of spectacular natural wonders meet to create a stunning experience, inspired a spiritual connection to the land for American Indians, settlers, and newcomers, and continue to inspire modern visitors to the park. Panoramic views are available from a number of high-elevation vistas and meadows. As day turns to night, visitors are treated to the changing natural patterns and intensity of light, alpenglow, and dark skies filled with stars. The clean, clear air of the park contributes to the quality of the scenic vistas.
- **Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River Designations.** More than 94% of Yosemite is designated as Yosemite Wilderness, contributing to one of the largest contiguous areas of protected wilderness in the lower 48 states. Additionally, 135 miles of the Merced and Tuolumne Rivers are designated as part of the national wild and scenic river system. This striking landscape strongly exemplifies the wilderness character and outstandingly remarkable values of these designations. Natural processes continue largely unimpeded and the primitive landscape provides a haven for flora and fauna. Visitors can experience quiet, solitude, and unique wilderness- or river-based recreation.



- **Abundance and Quality of Water Resources.** Water is a pervasive resource at Yosemite National Park. In addition to its designated wild and scenic rivers, the park also protects hundreds of other streams and rivers, lakes, ponds, wet meadows, and waterfalls. The abundance and quality of these water resources are vital for supporting the integrity of the natural resources at the park, telling the story of people's use of the land, providing many of the park's recreational opportunities, and supplying a critical source of water for the state of California.
- **Giant Sequoias.** Yosemite's giant sequoias were a fundamental inspiration and driving force behind the establishment of the park and the larger concept of setting aside land for public protection and conservation. These three small groves, which contain some of the largest living things on earth, are ancient relics of what was once a large expansive range of giant sequoia forests that dominated the landscape of the Sierra Nevada.

# Fundamental Resources and Values



- Ecological Diversity.** Yosemite's almost 11,000 feet of vertical gradient provide for a unique assemblage of plant and animal species. These resources include intact old growth forest, alpine and subalpine and montane meadows, as well as a vast array of vegetation, including almost 1,500 vascular plant species. The pristine condition of the habitat found across this ecological gradient helps support more than 400 species of vertebrates, including some of the rarest species in California. It is also a core piece in a much larger conservation landscape that protects the movement of species across the Sierra Nevada and encourages natural processes, including fire.
- Enduring Human Connections.** For thousands of years, humans have changed, and have been changed by, this place we now call Yosemite. The archeological resources, ethnographic resources, hundreds of historic structures (including many listed in the national register or designated as a national historic landmark), cultural landscapes, and more than 4 million items in the park's museum collection help tell the story of Yosemite's past. The millions of people who have found a personal connection to Yosemite, including the seven present-day tribes that descended from the people who first called Yosemite home, continue to value Yosemite's past and steward its future.
- Diverse Recreational Experiences.** Yosemite National Park is a four-season recreation destination in which visitors may immerse themselves in the spectacular natural setting of the Sierra Nevada. The physical features for which the park is known, such as Half Dome and El Capitan, provide experiences that are sought after by visitors around the world. The setting of Yosemite was purposefully protected as a source of recreation for visitors both near and far and provides a breadth of recreational opportunities that allow a wide diversity of visitor experiences including rejuvenation, opportunities for solitude, physical fitness, and emotional awe-inspiring connections.
- Educational Opportunities.** The park provides a wide range of experiential learning opportunities that foster connections to the park and other protected places, growing the next generations of stewards. When set aside by Congress, Yosemite was envisioned as a living laboratory. Today hundreds of research permits are processed every year to provide opportunities for students, scientists, and citizen scientists to learn, discover, and explore.
- Global Leadership in Conservation.** From its inception in 1864, Yosemite National Park has been a pioneer in conservation ethics. The park has long served as a public meeting place for scientific symposiums and as an internationally recognized laboratory for developing and testing sustainability and conservation practices. The park's formal sister park relationships with China, Chile, Germany, Mongolia, Nepal, and Tanzania further its global reach.



# 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.

- Yosemite's beauty draws people from all over the world and from all walks of life and can bring a sense of peace, serenity, and tranquility—a welcome respite from the pressure and stresses of everyday life.
- The complex and dynamic geologic processes in Yosemite create an unusually diverse and changing landscape, which yields world-class scenery and opportunities for significant scientific research.
- Giant sequoias offer opportunities for sharing Yosemite-related stories, including the inspiration to create the Yosemite Grant, the preservation of unique places, survival, and the wonder of living things so old and so large.
- The concept of wilderness originated in the United States with the conviction that some wildland resources are most valuable to Americans when natural process are allowed to prevail. Yosemite Wilderness is managed to retain its primitive character so that it can remain a special place for people to examine their relationships to the natural world.
- Just as national parks tell the stories of the nation, wild and scenic rivers include the country's natural and cultural heritage along their banks and within their flowing waters.
- For at least 8,000 years, people have engaged directly with the Tuolumne River, its meadows, and surrounding granite domes. Layers of human history communicate stories of Tuolumne as a place of inspiration, debate, and spiritual renewal.
- Yosemite's pristine natural environments provide for an exceptional diversity of living things and serve as a vital living research laboratory.
- While living in or traveling through the region now called Yosemite National Park, numerous American Indian groups traded resources, exchanged knowledge, and sometimes intermarried—traditions that continue to this day.
- Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove were the first globally recognized scenic natural areas to be set aside by any government for public benefit and appreciation of landscape beauty, making Yosemite the birthplace of the national park idea, which has spread throughout the world.
- The post-1850 cultural story in Yosemite provides abundant opportunities to reflect on the history of tourism, preservation, management, and the development of a National Park Service ethic.
- It was in Yosemite that the first NPS designers developed a unique architectural style for park structures. The Yosemite Museum, The Ahwahnee Hotel, and the Rangers' Club are all early examples of the Rustic Style of architecture that later became synonymous with NPS architecture. The rustic architecture style can be seen across the country due to the NPS oversight of the Civilian Conservation Corps and development of parks nationwide.
- Designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site globally recognizes Yosemite as a place of outstanding value to humanity and provides an opportunity for international collaboration and exchange.
- The connection between climbers and Yosemite is historical, physical, and spiritual. Rock climbing immerses people in this place, which can promote appropriate, sustainable, and direct connections to Yosemite.

