



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Foundation Document Overview

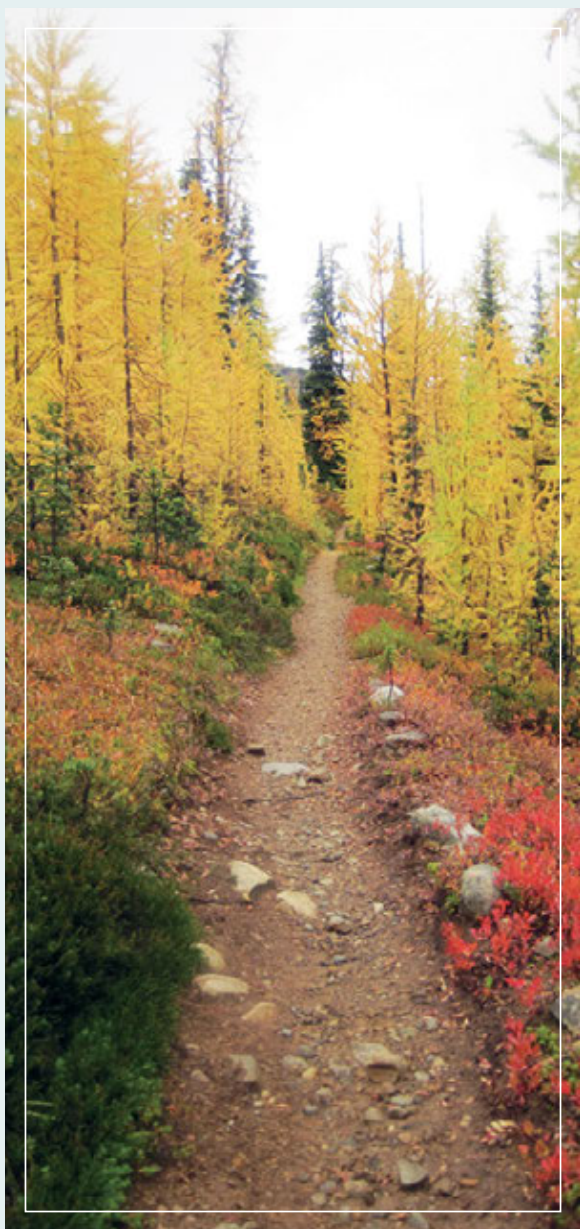
Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail

California, Oregon, Washington



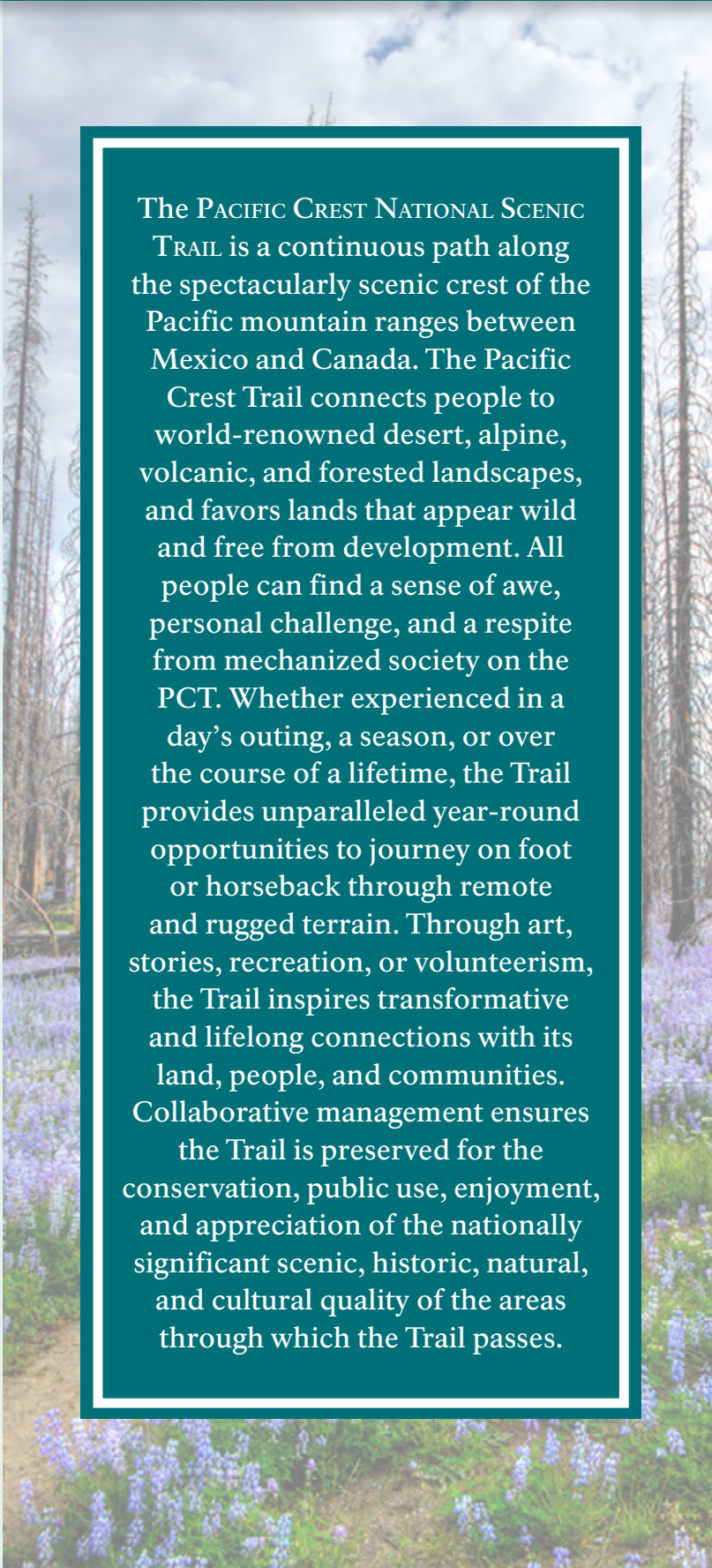
Land Acknowledgement

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail traverses ancestral homelands of more than 80 American Indian tribes who have cared for and honored this land since time immemorial and share a continuous and committed bond with these places. Segments of the Pacific Crest Trail trace the foot-worn paths of trade and travel routes cultivated over generations by tribes. The lands through which the PCT travels are essential to a way of life and the well-being of tribal communities.



Nature and Purposes

The PACIFIC CREST NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL is a continuous path along the spectacularly scenic crest of the Pacific mountain ranges between Mexico and Canada. The Pacific Crest Trail connects people to world-renowned desert, alpine, volcanic, and forested landscapes, and favors lands that appear wild and free from development. All people can find a sense of awe, personal challenge, and a respite from mechanized society on the PCT. Whether experienced in a day's outing, a season, or over the course of a lifetime, the Trail provides unparalleled year-round opportunities to journey on foot or horseback through remote and rugged terrain. Through art, stories, recreation, or volunteerism, the Trail inspires transformative and lifelong connections with its land, people, and communities. Collaborative management ensures the Trail is preserved for the conservation, public use, enjoyment, and appreciation of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, and cultural quality of the areas through which the Trail passes.



Trail Description

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail spans 2,650 miles (4,265 kilometers) between the Mexican and Canadian borders through California, Oregon, and Washington. It crosses tribal lands, 25 national forest units, 6 national park units, 7 Bureau of Land Management field offices, 51 Wilderness areas, and numerous state and county parks. It ascends more than 100 major mountain passes and skirts the shores of innumerable bodies of water. The Pacific Crest Trail encompasses the greatest elevation range of any National Scenic Trail while traversing nine ecoregions of North America. The PCT is a treasured pathway through some of the most outstanding scenery in the United States. Thousands of hikers and equestrians enjoy this international treasure each year. Some travel a few miles, others complete the entire Trail in a single season. In addition to trail users, countless others may experience the Trail through images, art, and stories.

The Trail has a long history of volunteerism, leading to its establishment. As early as 1926, Catherine Montgomery championed the idea of a hiking trail along the ridges of California, Oregon, and Washington. In March 1932, Clinton C. Clarke organized the Pacific Crest Trail System Conference, a group of hiking and riding clubs devoted to the development of a Pacific Crest Trail System. In 1968, the National Trails System Act designated the Pacific Crest Trail as one of the nation's first National Scenic Trails. The Act called for the extended trails to be "located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass." Encouraging greater public access, the Act highlighted the key importance of citizen groups and volunteerism for the PCT, and specifically called for "fostering volunteer programs and opportunities to engage volunteers in all aspects of trail planning, development, maintenance, management, and education." A close, public-private partnership for the Trail was codified by the passage of the National Trails System Act.

The Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior, administers the PCT. The Forest Service has been assigned overall responsibility for administration of the Trail and coordination with other agencies. Today, federal and state agencies, the Pacific Crest Trail Association, other nonprofit organizations, and local communities work closely together to steward the Trail and provide outstanding recreation opportunities for generations to come.



Significance

Significance statements express why the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail's resources and values are important enough to merit designation as a unit of the national trail system. These statements are linked to the nature and purposes of the Pacific Crest Trail, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Statements of significance describe the distinctive nature of the PCT and why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. They focus on the most important resources and values that will assist in Trail planning and management. The following significance statements have been identified for the PCT.

The Trail and Its Corridor

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail traverses ancestral homelands that have been bound to and cared for by the original people of these lands throughout and continuing on to countless generations. Today, the Pacific Crest Trail supports a critical connection for first peoples to traditional cultural places, sacred sites, and natural areas that are embedded in the fabric of the corridor itself.

Established as one of the nation's first National Scenic Trails, the 2,650 mile-long trail is the longest completed continuous equestrian experience in the United States. Fulfilling the idea of visionaries since the 1920s, the PCT is a construction marvel, travelling through some of the most dramatic, varying terrain in the United States. The original separate segments of the PCT traverse the mountain ranges of Washington, Oregon, or California, each representing their own diverse array of landscapes, were linked into one internationally recognized and continuous corridor.



Outstanding Recreation Opportunities

From tranquil walks through silent meadows of freshly fallen snow to challenging climbs over rugged mountain passes, from rural areas along the fringes of our populace to deep and unyielding wilderness expanses, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail provides outstanding year-round outdoor recreation opportunities. People can immerse themselves in the landscape, finding challenge, renewal, joy, self-reflection, opportunities for solitude, and deep connections with others. Traversing by foot or horseback along the heights of the land can simultaneously elevate the traveler to unparalleled heights and panoramic perspectives and ground one to the humility of being at the will of natural processes. The seemingly endless opportunities for adventure stoke the imagination and stir a sense of wanderlust, whether hiking sections near gateway communities, thru-hiking, skiing the remote crest in the winter, sharing outings with family or friends, or connecting to the Pacific Crest Trail and its experiences through images, art, and stories.

Testament to Volunteerism

Volunteers are one of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail's greatest resources and, as recognized by Congress, are essential. Devoting millions of hours in some of the most remote and rugged wildlands in the United States, the volunteer community cares for all aspects of the Pacific Crest Trail. On and off the Trail, volunteers share expertise, specialized skills, and knowledge of topics such as horse packing and advocacy. Their connections to the PCT have created a tradition of stewardship that may span years, decades, and even generations.



Significance

Partnerships, Ownership, Dedication, and Collaboration

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail was born out of a spirit of collaboration, and today the Pacific Crest Trail Association fosters innovation and teamwork where a distinctive coalition of government agencies, gateway communities, nonprofit and educational organizations, tribal groups, and individual volunteers work side-by-side. Cooperation, coordination, and collaborative management ensures that individual efforts blend into a continuous, cohesive conservation effort, creating a world-renowned model for partnerships.

Unique Geologic Features and Ecoregions

Following the crest of Pacific mountain ranges, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail traverses an incredible assemblage of ecological features and ecoregions. Crossing terrain shaped by the Pacific Ring of Fire, the Pacific Crest Trail passes beneath the stratovolcanoes of the Cascades, cuts through dramatic river gorges, meanders through valleys etched by glaciers and adorned with the granite batholiths of the Sierra Nevada, and navigates along jagged crests and fault lines shaped by plate tectonics emblematic of the American West. Ecoregions encompassing the Trail include a diverse range of ecosystems, from the southern Sonoran and the Mojave deserts to the high alpine tundra and to the coniferous forests of the Pacific Northwest, an incredible level of biodiversity, including endemic, protected, endangered, threatened, and sensitive species. The PCT connects habitats and watersheds across thousands of miles and acts as a nationally significant protected corridor where ecological processes can continue.

Acknowledgement and Honor of Indigenous People

More than 80 American Indian tribes are intrinsically connected to the lands along the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail where they have lived in and traveled through since time immemorial. The antiquity of resource use is evident across the landscape in roasting pits, berry processing camps, tree scars, and many other features that are discernible to experienced observers. These lands reflect and cultivate a bond with a way of life based on long-standing traditions and practices that support a variety of tribal values beyond their importance as sustenance and habitat for people, plants, and animals. Nonmaterial values include a sense of place, historical, spiritual, sacredness, and other dimensions of cultural significance that are vital to the care and well-being of this bonded existence between people and landscapes.

History and Culture

Traversing a mosaic of landscapes inhabited by peoples for thousands of years, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail is home to irreplaceable artifacts, structures, and places. The legacy of the Pacific Crest Trail, its travelers, and the resources through which it passes offer exceptional opportunities to understand the region's natural and cultural values through time. The Trail navigates these storied landscapes through the triumphs, defeats, hopes, and fears of indigenous people, immigrants, explorers, prospectors, conservationists, and trail advocates.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values (FRVs) are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the nature and purposes of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail and maintaining its significance. FRVs are closely related to a Pacific Crest Trail legislative nature and purposes and are more specific than significance statements.

FRVs help focus planning and management efforts on what is truly significant about the PCT. One of the most important responsibilities of public lands managers is to ensure the conservation and public enjoyment of those qualities that are essential and fundamental to achieving the nature and purposes of the Trail and maintaining its significance. If FRVs are allowed to deteriorate, the PCT's nature and purposes and/or significance could be jeopardized. The following fundamental resources and values have been identified for the PCT.

The Trail Itself

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail was envisioned, designed, and built to meet construction standards for horse travel. It is managed and maintained for foot and horse travel as a continuous 2,650-mile path through some of the most provocative yet unforgiving terrain. Supporting trail facilities are intentionally limited in size, scale, and quantity and are designed to be minimal, rustic, and harmonize with the surrounding landscapes. The Pacific Crest Trail is located and generally managed to avoid substantial human modifications of the natural environment. The culmination of these unique attributes extends to the most remote segments and traverses strikingly undeveloped landscapes.



Mosaic of Internationally Recognized Treasures

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail has the distinction of passing through more Congressionally designated areas than any other National Trail. These treasured landscapes are a significant hallmark of the Pacific Crest Trail and highlight the wild, unique, and spectacular lands and rivers of the Trail. The PCT traverses crown jewels of the national park system and crosses four of the first five designated National Parks, six of the first ten designated National Forests, and a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site. Fifty-one Wilderness areas, sixteen Wild and Scenic Rivers, five National Monuments, one additional National Scenic Trail, six National Historic Trails, and three National Scenic and Recreation areas are found along the PCT's corridor. The Trail extends the unique opportunity to experience an expansive collection of some of the most wild and iconic landscapes in the world masterfully connected by the PCT, segment to segment, pass to pass, and nation to nation.

Scenery and Viewscapes

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail corridor encompasses some of the West's most spectacular and wild scenery featuring undeveloped, expansive views that appear as wholly intact, natural landscapes. The continuous and protected Pacific Crest Trail corridor is stewarded to support the ecological diversity found along the Trail and managed to maintain the landscape's unparalleled visual complexity and scenic integrity. Passing through high elevations, the PCT provides opportunities for experiencing sweeping panoramic views and deep starry night skies across a splendid range of high mountains, lakes, volcanoes, and deserts. The scale and magnitude of such views offer visitors a new perspective on their place in the natural world.

Education and Outdoor Learning

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail provides exceptional opportunities for education, both formal and informal. The Pacific Crest Trail corridor provides an outdoor classroom for school groups, scientific research efforts, and natural and cultural history exploration. Opportunities for self-discovery and recreation education from backcountry travel skills, to long-distance hiking, to low impact recreation practices such as Leave No Trace, are provided with intent and an eye towards inspiring the next generation's appreciation for the great outdoors. Trail stewardship also can be learned and includes trail maintenance, work skills, and cooperation.

Fundamental Resources and Values

The Journey

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail welcomes people from near and far to travel year-round by foot or horseback to experience world-class recreation. Visitors have the opportunity to experience natural sights and sounds, relax, reflect, connect, learn, and challenge themselves physically and mentally. The continuous long-distance nature of the Pacific Crest Trail and natural appearing settings evoke a feeling of immersion in wildlands.

Trail Communities

The connections forged along the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail transcend the physical accomplishment of the journey itself. Gateway communities have embraced and celebrated the Pacific Crest Trail and its character. As a treasured resource, the Trail also provides opportunities for community investments and tourism that can contribute to local economies, encourage outdoor education and healthy lifestyles, and sustain an enduring system of mutual support. Communities can also be created by shared trail experiences that form life-long bonds between strangers. The shared love of the PCT creates a sense of connection and purpose that is essential for committed stewardship and conscious management.

Empowered Volunteers

Volunteers are an integral part of the collaborative management of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. From its inception to today, volunteers protect, preserve, and promote the Pacific Crest Trail and its values. Every year, with the support of the Pacific Crest Trail Association and agency partners, volunteers build, reconstruct, and maintain the Trail; collect data; educate; and provide professional services, advocacy, training, and administrative support. The nature of the work entails specialized skillsets and training programs, provides immersive experiences, and fosters deep-seated commitments. Volunteerism for the PCT can span decades and generations, keeping the tradition of trail stewardship alive.



Enduring Collaborative Spirit

In support of the outstanding values and extended length of its corridor, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail is managed cooperatively between federal, state, county, and tribal governments, community and private partners, and volunteers. Partners collaborate across numerous jurisdictions and boundaries to create a seamless experience for trail users while acknowledging each entity's unique relationship to the Pacific Crest Trail. As directed by the National Trails System Act, this system of collaborative management has been in place since the PCT's designation, and this model is recognized internationally for its success.

Ecological Values

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail's continuous corridor traverses the upper watersheds of ecosystems, supporting ecological integrity and biodiversity. Linking large blocks of protected lands, the Pacific Crest Trail hosts an abundance of ecological diversity and unfragmented habitats that provide opportunities for wildlife migration, scientific research, and trail experiences immersed in some of our planet's most awe-inspiring natural systems. The PCT passes through nine ecoregions, each bearing its own biodiversity of species and unique ecological resources.

Stories Steeped in History

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail is rich in history and intersects with trade and travel routes that remain part of indigenous people's homelands. These routes were also used more recently by emigrants, settlers, explorers, prospectors, and ranchers in addition to people looking to be immersed in nature. The history also includes the development of the Pacific Crest Trail and the conservation movement, where people both advocated for and built the Trail. Opportunities to connect with the past and places of cultural significance are abundant along the PCT.

Interpretive Themes

As an organizational tool, interpretive themes reveal and clarify meaning, concepts, contexts, and values represented by the PCT resources. Themes are derived from, and reflect, Pacific Crest Trail nature and purposes, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for agency staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all the PCT's significance statements and fundamental resources and values.

Sound themes are accurate and reflect current scholarship and science. They encourage exploration of the context in which events or natural processes occurred and the effects of those events and processes. Interpretive themes go beyond a mere description of the event or process to foster multiple opportunities to experience and consider the Trail and its resources. These themes help explain why the PCT story is relevant to people who may otherwise be unaware of connections they have to an event, time, or place associated with the Trail. The following interpretive themes have been identified for the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail.

The Journey

Whether on foot or horseback, a journey along the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail connects travelers with a vast, rugged, and wild landscape that challenges the mind and body; for many, this is essential to well-being, personal transformation, and enjoyment.

Collaboration

Born out of a spirit of collaboration, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail inspires those connected by the spectacular mountain crests to champion the Trail, innovate around its challenges and opportunities, and share with the world its resources, stories, and values.



Volunteerism

Volunteers infuse life into the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail through their collaborative spirit and transformation of inspiration into action for the benefit of others. Volunteers share their passion for the Pacific Crest Trail through their exceptional and generous gifts of skill, commitment, and time.

Ecosystems and Geologic Processes

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail cuts through diverse, interconnected ecosystems and geologic processes compressed over time and space. From lowland deserts to volcanic peaks, environmental forces that occur over seconds or eons transform both the landscape and those who travel through it.

Mosaic of Internationally Recognized Treasures

Connecting nationally and internationally significant landscapes, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail demonstrates the value of conservation for current and future generations through its opportunities to experience treasured places.

Acknowledgment and Honor of Indigenous People

Serving as the first stewards of the lands through which the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail passes, more than 80 American Indian Tribes call these lands home and hold a deep and enduring sacred connection with these places.

History and Culture

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail and the lands through which it passes represent stories of the many groups and individuals that traversed the Pacific Crest mountain ranges and lowlands. The stories of tribes, explorers, ranchers, activists, and trail users endure today, providing insight into the loss, sacrifice, triumph, defeats, hopes and fears shared by centuries of people. Uniting friends and connecting strangers, these stories are all tied together by the common thread of the Pacific Crest Trail.