



Foundation Document Overview

Guadalupe Mountains National Park

Texas



Contact Information

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Purpose



GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK preserves, protects, and interprets an area of outstanding geological values, scenery, wilderness, and other natural resources in the northern Chihuahuan Desert of West Texas.

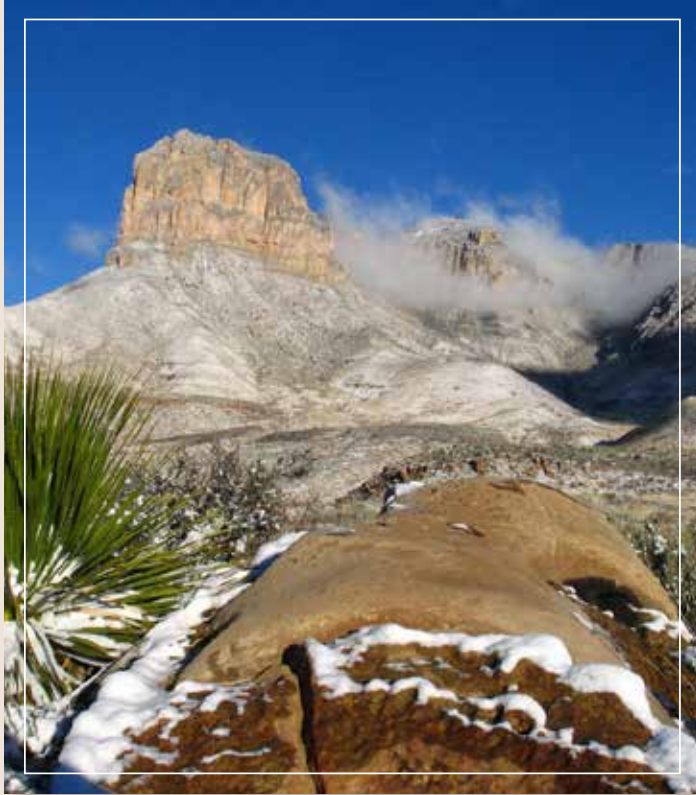


Significance

Significance statements express why Guadalupe Mountains 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.

- Situated at the western edge of one of the world's most well-studied and well-exposed fossil reef systems, the rocks of the Guadalupe Mountains gave their name to the Middle Permian time interval, the Guadalupian Series. Within the park are three internationally recognized reference points for the Guadalupian, known as Global Stratotype Sections and Points.
- The Border Fault on the west side of the park extends for almost 140 miles through New Mexico and Texas. Uplift along this fault has exposed more than 5,000 feet of rock such that the vertical and lateral relationships of different rock units can be seen and studied. The superb exposures reveal rocks spanning 12 million to 14 million years and show the interrelationships of three different marine depositional systems. Scientists continue to study rocks in the park to see how sedimentation changed with changes in plate tectonics and paleoclimate. The geology of the park continues to inform scientists on processes involved in, and the physical responses to, climate change.
- The Chihuahuan Desert, Rocky Mountain, and Southern Great Plains ecosystems intersect at the park. The park's topography, with almost a mile of vertical relief from the desert floor to the top of Guadalupe Peak, provides a diversity of habitats and microhabitats, some of which contain relict and endemic species.
- The designated and proposed Guadalupe Mountains Wilderness is the largest in the state of Texas and allows visitors to experience personal challenges and solitude in rugged and remote desert and mountain landscapes.

Fundamental Resources and Values



- The diversity of archeological sites and early homesteads attests to the importance of the mountains' resources to generations of people. The mountains have served as a landmark along European American transportation routes including the Butterfield Overland Stage Route, early airmail transportation routes, and the original highway between Carlsbad and El Paso. Park resources continue to have spiritual significance for tribes and others.
- Guadalupe Mountains National Park hosts eight of the ten highest peaks in Texas and provides an abundance of outstanding, primitive recreational opportunities and excellent vantage points from which to view the surrounding Chihuahuan Desert landscape.
- Unobstructed views, both into and out of the park, highlight the stark contrast between the highest peaks in Texas and the Chihuahuan Desert surrounding them. The park showcases complex desert, riparian, and montane ecosystems where visitors can view spectacular seasonal colors, white sand dunes, wildlife, rock-ribbed canyons and cliffs, brilliant night skies, and traces of past human occupation.

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.

- **Geology**
- **Paleontology**
- **Scenic Values**
- **Wilderness Values**
- **Chihuahuan Desert, Sky Island Ecosystem**



Guadalupe Mountains National Park 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.

- **Cultural Continuity**
- **Cultural Landscapes**
- **National Register of Historic Places Properties**

Description

Guadalupe Mountains National Park was authorized by an act of Congress (Public Law 89-667) in 1966 to preserve “an area possessing outstanding geological values together with scenic and other natural values of great significance.” The park was formally established in 1972 with an area of 76,293 acres.

Today, Guadalupe Mountains National Park includes 86,416 acres in west Texas, just south of the New Mexico state line and north of U.S. Highway 62/180. The Guadalupe Mountains rise more than 3,000 feet above the arid Chihuahuan Desert that surrounds them. El Capitan, the park’s most striking feature, is a 1,000-foot-high limestone cliff. Nearby Guadalupe Peak, 8,749 feet above sea level, is the highest point in Texas.

The Guadalupe Mountains are part of a mostly buried 400-mile-long U-shaped fossil reef complex, Capitan Reef, which extends through a large area of west Texas and southeastern New Mexico. The longest exposed stretch of Capitan Reef, 12 miles of which is in the park, extends northeast from Guadalupe Mountains National Park almost to Carlsbad, New Mexico, a distance of nearly 40 miles. This 260–270-million-year-old reef is one of the world’s finest examples of an ancient reef system. The fossil-bearing strata of the park are also associated with the rich “oil patch” of the Delaware Basin of west Texas. Three internationally significant geological stratotype sections and points, and numerous type sections of rock, are present in the park.

The park is designated as a Class I air quality area under the Clean Air Act, which provides the highest level of protection. Air pollution sources with the potential to affect the scenic values for which the park was created are subject to stringent controls to prevent future impairment from human-caused air pollution. In 1978, 46,850 acres of the park’s backcountry were formally designated by Congress as wilderness. On October 28, 1988, Congress passed legislation that enlarged the park by 10,123 acres. The new land includes gypsum and quartzose dunes in an area west of and adjacent to the park boundary. All of the land identified in the 1988 legislation has been deeded to the National Park Service.

The cultural history of the Guadalupe Mountains includes native peoples and successive waves of European-American explorers, travelers, and immigrants. Although Spanish explorers passed through the area in 1692, the arid desert and remote highlands of the Guadalupe Mountains were the

domain of American Indian peoples until the mid-1800s. Gradually, explorers and pioneers entered the area and navigated using the distinctive landmark of the Guadalupe. In 1858 the Butterfield Overland Stage Line began carrying mail and passengers through the Guadalupe Mountains on the nation’s first transcontinental mail route.

The settlement of ranches around the Guadalupe Mountains began in the mid-1800s and led to periodic conflicts with the Mescalero Apache Tribe. During the U.S. Army’s military campaign against the Mescalero Apache Tribe, the high country of the Guadalupe Mountains was one of the tribe’s last sanctuaries. By 1880, the majority of the Mescalero Apache Tribe no longer occupied the Guadalupe Mountains region. Subsequent years brought more ranchers to the area. In the 1920s and 1930s, J.C. Hunter purchased many of the properties and consolidated them into one large holding. Hunter built structures and an extensive livestock watering system that pumped spring water from the southeast lowlands to the high country.

Wallace Pratt, a petroleum geologist charmed by the Guadalupe Mountains, bought land in McKittrick Canyon in the 1930s and built two residences that remain in the park. In 1959, Pratt donated his land to the National Park Service. Adjacent lands owned by Hunter and others were eventually purchased and combined into the new Guadalupe Mountains National Park.

