



Foundation Document Overview

Lake Mead National Recreation Area

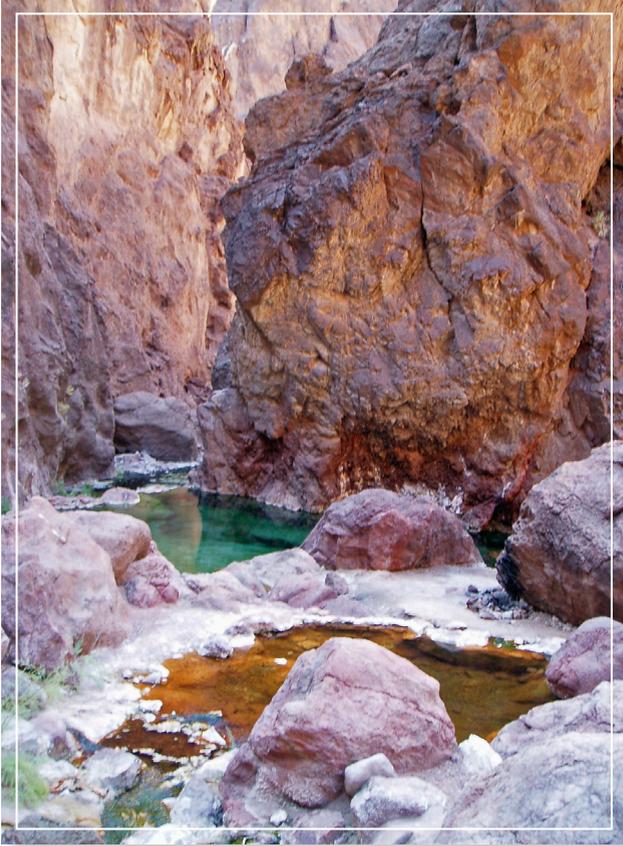
Arizona and Nevada



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA is to provide diverse public recreation, benefit, and use on Lakes Mead and Mohave and surrounding lands in a manner that preserves the ecological, geological, cultural, historical, scenic, scientific, and wilderness resources of the park.



Significance

Significance statements express why Lake Mead National Recreation Area 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.

- As the first and largest national recreation area in the national park system, Lake Mead National Recreation Area is an expression of the national value of expanding outdoor recreation opportunities. The National Park Service manages public access to the waters, shorelines, and surrounding lands of the park, including the largest reservoir in the United States.
- Lake Mead National Recreation Area offers dramatic scenery and a diverse array of land- and water-based recreation opportunities in close proximity to several large urban centers of the southwestern United States. With approximately seven million visitors each year, the park supports some of the nation's highest levels of water recreation and backcountry use.
- Situated in the northeastern Mojave Desert near the interface with both the Great Basin Desert to the north and the Sonoran Desert to the south, Lake Mead National Recreation Area preserves a great diversity of biological resources, intact habitat, and ecological connectivity in the region, including many endemic, threatened, and endangered species and rare natural communities.



Fundamental Resources and Values

- Lake Mead National Recreation Area showcases a remarkable collection of geological and paleontological features spanning more than 1.4 billion years of the earth's history. These exposed features, which include bajadas, lava flows, granite plutons, boulder fields, volcanoes, fault lines, petrified wood, and other fossils, collectively provide insights into complex geologic processes and represent some of the oldest rocks in this geographic region.
- The high diversity of cultural resources found at Lake Mead National Recreation Area—both on land and submerged—remain as evidence of a 10,000-year continuum of human history in the region. These resources represent many human themes and stories that relate to numerous Native American cultures and their adaption to and migration through the landscape, as well as European settlement, mining, ranching, exploration, and the construction of Hoover Dam.
- Lake Mead National Recreation Area contains vast backcountry and wilderness lands, including nine designated wilderness areas that cover more than 185,000 acres and several other proposed, eligible, or potential wilderness lands that encompass an additional 373,000 acres. These lands serve to preserve ecological resources and processes and provide exemplary opportunities for primitive recreation and desert solitude.
- Lake Mead National Recreation Area contains water storage reservoirs and infrastructure managed by water and energy supply agencies that provide critical resources to Nevada, Arizona, and California. These resources also provide a focal point for scientific research and policy discussions of national importance, including: the implications of urbanization on water scarcity, the need for water use efficiency and sustainable land uses, the importance of maintaining high water quality, and the effects of climate change on the natural and human environment.



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.

- **Abundant Land and Water Recreation**
- **Opportunities to Appreciate Spectacular Scenery**
- **Riverine and Reservoir Ecosystems**
- **Groundwater**
- **Diverse Array of Geologic Features and Processes**
- **Functional Desert Habitats**
- **Species of Conservation Interest**
- **Lands with Wilderness Character**
- **Science and Research**
- **Cultural Landscapes and Historic Structures**
- **History and Cultural Anthropology**
- **Archeology**

Lake Mead National Recreation Area 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, and include:

- **Experiential Opportunities**
- **Clean Air**
- **Transboundary Connectivity**



Description

Lake Mead National Recreation Area (NRA) is a startling contrast of desert and water, mountains and canyons, primitive backcountry and human innovation. Two powerful forces created the backdrop for this park. First, natural processes occurring over millions of years along the interface of the Basin and Range geologic province and the Colorado Plateau geologic province built its foundation. This landscape consists of vast desert expanses, dramatic geologic features, and diverse ecological communities. Then, over the past 100 years, humans modified the landscape to better suit it to present day needs. The primary modifications include two massive reservoirs—Mead and Mohave—in one of earth's hottest, driest regions. These lakes supply high-quality municipal water, power production, and agricultural irrigation water to tens of millions of people across Nevada, Arizona, California, and Mexico. Collectively, Lake Mead NRA encompasses this unique array of natural and modified landscape and waterscape.

With this combination of large water bodies amidst vast desert expanses in Nevada and Arizona, Lake Mead NRA provides a diverse recreational resource. As the nation's first national recreation area, water- and land-based recreation attract approximately seven million visitors per year, which makes the park one of the most visited park units in the national park system and an integral component of the region's economy. Larger than the state of Delaware at 1.5 million acres, Lake Mead NRA is the third largest unit in the national park system outside of Alaska. This figure includes more than 185,000 acres of designated wilderness and more than 373,000 additional acres of proposed, eligible, and potential wilderness.

The park represents elements of the Mojave, Sonoran, and Great Basin deserts. The geologic diversity and convergence of these desert ecosystems provide habitat for a rich diversity of plants and animals.



Currently, 822 native plant species and 387 native animal species have been officially documented in the park, with 10 of these listed as threatened, endangered, or candidate species, and 140 considered rare species. Informal documentation indicates that many more species of animals and plants inhabit the park. In addition, the park contains globally significant herds of desert bighorn sheep, with some of the highest population numbers in the world.

Also included in the park's diverse natural resources are spectacular vistas including deep canyons, sheer cliffs, layers of sharp and colorful mountain ridges and rock formations, and sweeping bajadas.

Both terrestrial and submerged landscapes add to the park's rich human history and diversity. Evidence of 10,000 years of Native American civilization is found in the vicinity of the Lake Mead NRA. Fur trappers, Mormon settlers, prospectors, ranchers, and developers of riverboat and railroad supply networks arrived later in attempts to survive and prosper in the rugged desert environment. Architectural wonders such as the Hoover Dam, built in the 1930s, and the Mike O'Callaghan-Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge that opened in 2010, add to the rich human history. Today, Lake Mead NRA is an attraction to millions of people from large metropolitan communities in the region as well as visitors from all over the world.

