



Foundation Document Overview

Little River Canyon National Preserve

Alabama



Contact Information

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Purpose



LITTLE RIVER CANYON NATIONAL PRESERVE protects and provides for the enjoyment of the scenery, ecology, and history surrounding one of the Southeast's deepest canyons carved by the nation's longest mountain-top river.



Significance

Significance statements express why Little River Canyon National Preserve 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.

1. Little River Canyon is the deepest canyon in Alabama, and it is one of the deepest in the southeast United States. It contains the highest waterfall in the state, and is resplendent with sheer rock walls, cascading waters, and ever-changing seasonal views.
2. With exceptional recreational opportunities, Little River Canyon provides world-class whitewater paddling, internationally renowned climbing, and more than 8,000 acres of public lands open to hunting, fishing, and trapping.
3. The Little River is the only river in the United States that forms on and flows almost its entire length along a mountain top. Little River's high water quality supports biological diversity, exceptional aquatic riparian communities, and rare and endemic species. This mountain-top river is designated as an Alabama Outstanding National Resource Water.
4. The location of the preserve along the southern limits of the Cumberland Plateau contributes to a rare assemblage of plants and animals, including the endangered green pitcher plant.



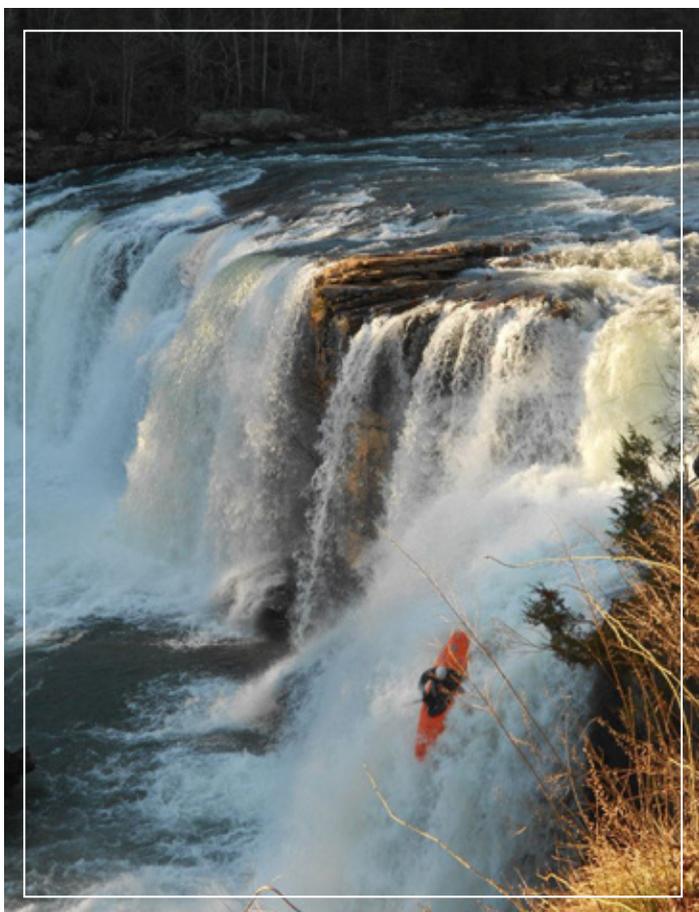
Fundamental Resources and Values

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.

- **The Little River**
- **The Canyon**
- **Canyon Recreation**
- **Native Plants and Wildlife Communities**
- **Backcountry Experience and Landscape**

Little River Canyon National Preserve 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 Resources**



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.

- **The Canyon.** With its rugged towering rock bluffs and the roaring river below, the Little River Canyon offers a place of solitude, beauty, and awe, showcasing the power of water and its ability to dramatically change the landscape forever.
- **Recreation.** The preserve is a place where visitors seek the invigoration of whitewater boating, the challenge of sheer wall climbing, and the solitude of hiking into the depths of the canyon; visitors seek a type of recreation and discover rejuvenation that only nature can provide.
- **Little River.** Little River is a source of life and renewal, providing habitat for a high diversity of benthic invertebrates, and good water quality for flora and fauna thriving in the corridor.
- **Plant and Animal Communities.** The preserve provides niche habitats for ecological communities such as Appalachian bogs and Cumberland sandstone glades, and is a home for rare plants and animals to survive.
- **Cultural Resources.** Visitors are inspired by stories of survival and great adversity as they discover and explore the artifacts and history of native peoples and early settlers who have lived on the lands, sourced life from Little River, and enjoyed the beauty of the canyon.
- **Backcountry.** The wildness of the backcountry area allows visitors to interact with the landscape and develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural scenery, forests, and habitats of northeastern Alabama.



Description

Located on the boundary of De Kalb and Cherokee Counties, in the rugged yet verdant landscape of northeast Alabama, Little River Canyon National Preserve (the preserve) was established in 1992 by Public Law 102-427 to protect the landscapes of the Little River Canyon. The authorized boundary of the preserve currently contains 15,288 acres, 11,042 acres of which are federally owned and managed. Protected within the preserve boundary are the spectacular Little River Canyon, the pristine Little River, and a number of rare and threatened plant and animal species. Together with the adjacent DeSoto State Park, Little River Canyon National Preserve provides abundant scenic views and varied recreational opportunities for locals and visitors alike.

The preserve sits at the southern edge of the Cumberland Plateau, a distinct physiographic region just to the west of the main Appalachian Mountain uplift. Composed of sandstone and other sedimentary rocks, this area has been eroded by water over millions of years to create a landscape of ridges, outcroppings, and gorges known as a 'dissected' plateau. Little River Canyon is one of the most spectacular landforms in this region, carved into the flat top of Lookout Mountain and

reaching depths in excess of 600 feet in some sections. It is one of the deepest canyon systems east of the Mississippi River and the deepest in the state of Alabama.

The sculptor of this canyon is the Little River, which is notable for flowing for most of its length atop a mountain as well as for possessing very high water quality. The river flows from its headwaters in northwestern Georgia to Weiss Lake in a mostly unimpaired manner. To protect this water quality, scenic, recreational, and fish and wildlife values over time, the Little River and its tributaries receive the protections afforded under section 7(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and are also designated as Outstanding National Resource Waters by the state of Alabama.

Little River Canyon is home to an unusually diverse set of plant and animal species, owing to its location at the confluence of the Cumberland Plateau and Gulf Coastal Plain physiographic regions, as well as a number of different microhabitats created by the rugged physical features of the canyon. Some species found in the preserve are notable for their limited geographic distribution, such as the Kral's water-plantain (*Sagittaria*

secundifolia), while others such as the green pitcher plant (*Sarracenia oreophila*) are listed as federally endangered.

The preserve offers a diverse range of recreational opportunities, including swimming, fishing, climbing, and world-class whitewater paddling, with the latter reaching peak season in winter and spring. Canyon Rim Drive (Alabama State Road 176) hugs the west rim of Little River Canyon, offering scenic drives and connecting a series of overlooks that offer views into the canyon, and Cherokee County Road 275 continues along the west rim down to the canyon mouth. Hunting and trapping are permitted by legislation within the preserve, and these activities are managed by the National Park Service in cooperation with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

