



# Foundation Document Overview

## Mojave National Preserve

California

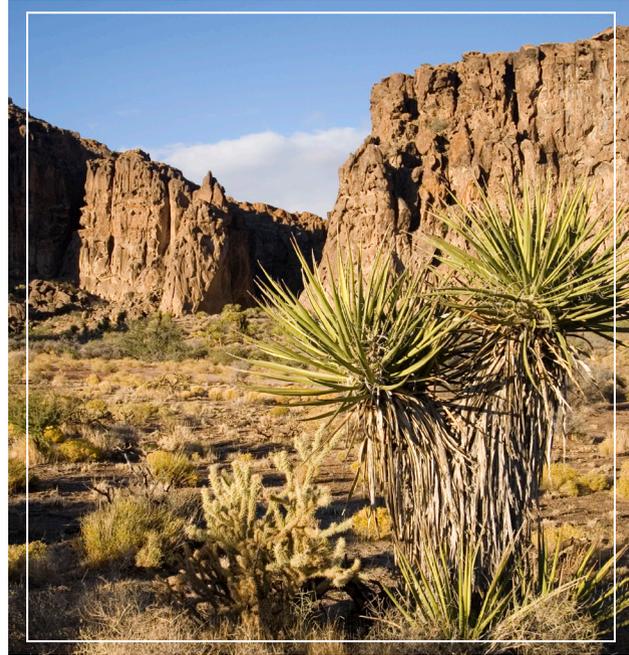


Photo credit: Benjamin Chemel

### Contact Information

For more information about the *Mojave National Preserve Foundation Document*, contact: [moja\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:moja_superintendent@nps.gov) or 760-252-6100 or write to:  
Superintendent, Mojave National Preserve, 2701 Barstow Road, Barstow, CA 92311

## Purpose



*Mojave National Preserve protects a diverse mosaic of desert ecological communities and functions, and evidence of a 10,000-year history of human connection with the desert. By offering extensive opportunities to experience a wide variety of desert landscapes, the preserve promotes understanding and appreciation for the increasingly threatened resources of the Mojave Desert, and encourages a sense of discovery and connection to wild places.*



Photo credit: Sisto Cordova

## Significance

Significance statements express why Mojave National Preserve resources and values are important enough to merit designation as a national preserve. 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 preserve, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the preserve and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the preserve.

- Mojave National Preserve protects a large, relatively intact ecosystem of the eastern Mojave Desert from continuing threats associated with expanding development and provides connectivity between other protected natural areas within the larger Mojave Desert ecoregion.
- Mojave National Preserve offers exceptional access to remote, wild places and provides a unique sense of discovery for visitors throughout its 1.6 million acres.
- The preserve encompasses a wide variety of classic desert landforms, including mesas, bajadas, dry lakes, sand dunes, and cinder cones. These exposed geologic features exemplify the rugged beauty of the West.
- Mojave National Preserve provides opportunities for solitude, exemplified by natural sounds and dark night skies, functioning as an increasingly rare refuge from nearby urban areas.
- Mojave National Preserve has a long, robust history as a well-traveled corridor across a harsh and foreboding desert, linking the Southwest with the coast of California from ancient times to the present.
- Mojave National Preserve protects a continuous record and remnant sites of the resilient people who have adapted to and manipulated the desert through evolving relationships with the landscape—shaped by cultural values that are both ancient and contemporary.



## 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 preserve and maintaining its significance.

- Full range of biological diversity of native species representative of the eastern Mojave Desert ecosystem, minimally disturbed by humans
- Exposed geologic features and landforms, including sand dunes, cinder cones, mesas, and dry lakes
- Desert scenery (encompassing geology, landscape, vegetation, big sky, wildlife, etc.)
- Living laboratory that provides unique opportunities for education and research of abundant cultural resources and a minimally disturbed desert ecosystem
- Natural soundscapes and dark night skies
- Vast expanse of undeveloped open space, including (but not limited to) wilderness
- Sense of discovery
- Exemplary relics, sites, stories, and other resources associated with ancient inhabitants and Mojave and Chemehuevi tribal cultures
- Exemplary relics, sites, stories, and other resources associated with historic uses of the eastern Mojave Desert (including mining, ranching, homesteading, and railroad history)
- Exemplary sites and stories associated with early trade, exploration, and transportation routes such as the Mojave Road and the Old Spanish National Historic Trail



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a national park unit. Themes are derived from—and reflect—the preserve's purpose, significance, and fundamental resources and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the preserve significances and fundamental resources and values.

- *Desert Confluence*  
Complex and varied microhabitats within the Basin and Range Province, created by the interplay of topography, weather, and hydrology, produce the conditions that support a rich diversity of Mojave Desert ecosystems interlaced with plant species typically found in the Great Basin and Sonoran deserts.
- *Geologic Landforms*  
Over millions of years, geologic forces have shaped the Mojave landscape, providing classic examples of igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic processes and of landforms such as cinder cones, lava beds, sand dunes, playas, mesas, and bajadas.
- *Desert Adaptations*  
Joshua trees, desert tortoises, and desert bighorn sheep are not only iconic examples of the diversity of plants and animals of the Mojave Desert, but also are emblematic of the surprising adaptations that have allowed diverse life forms to thrive in this arid environment.
- *Environmental Threats*  
Deserts are often viewed as empty wastelands, but in fact, they are mosaics of ecosystems rich in diversity, but easily impacted by human activities.
- *Human Habitation*  
Historical and cultural resources of the California desert spanning 10,000 years of human presence are found at sites associated with both ancient and more recent tribal cultures, as well as more recent patterns of exploration; westward expansion; and mining, ranching, and railroading history.
- *Desert Wilderness*  
The size and isolation of the preserve, nearly half of which is designated wilderness, combined with relative ease of access, offer unrivaled opportunities for visitors to undertake primitive and unconfined recreational activities, experiencing an immersion in qualities such as solitude, natural quiet, expansive vistas, and dark night skies.

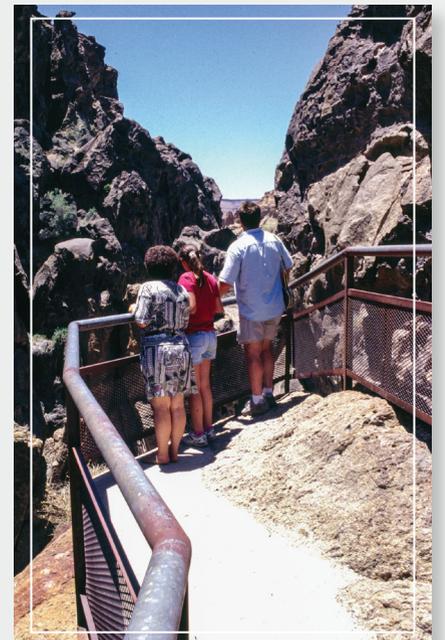
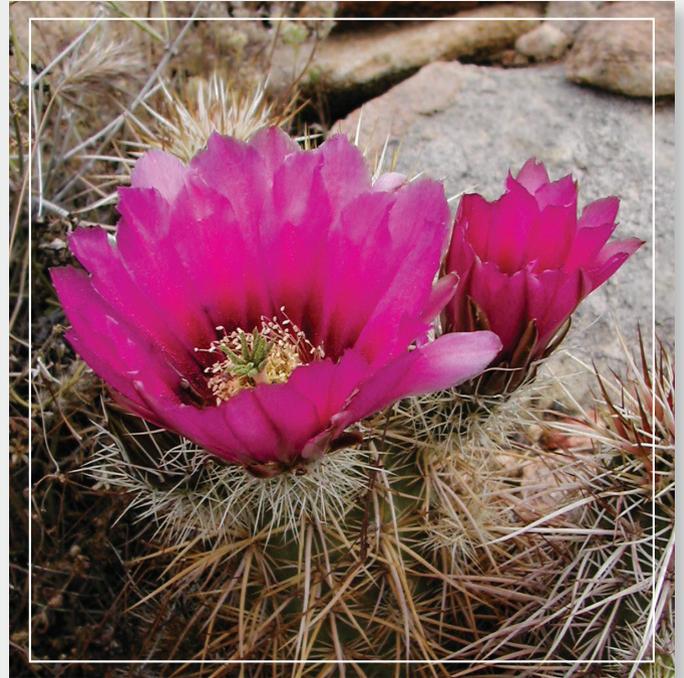
## Description of the Preserve

At a vast 1.6 million acres, Mojave National Preserve is the third-largest unit of the national park system in the contiguous United States, with just under 50% of the preserve (695,200 acres) designated as wilderness. The preserve is an expanse of desert lands that represents a mosaic of three of the four major North American deserts: the Great Basin, Sonoran, and Mojave. The remoteness, the vast open spaces, and lack of development instill a sense of discovery in visitors to the preserve and allow them to experience a wide variety of historical and natural features that exist nowhere else in the United States in such proximity to one another. Mojave National Preserve headquarters are located in Barstow, 60 miles from the western boundary of the preserve.

Mojave National Preserve is a land of mountain ranges, sand dunes, creosote flats, great mesas, extinct volcanoes, and other unusual desert landforms. The preserve protects an extensive variety of habitats and resilient and well-adapted plant and animal species. Cactus gardens, relict plant communities of white fir and chaparral, and one of the most significant Joshua tree populations in the world are all found here. However, continued warming trends and increased variability in precipitation will continue to add stress to this ecosystem where many species already live near the extremes of physiological tolerance.

The Mojave Desert also has a vibrant cultural history; among the Joshua trees and rocky outcrops lie evidence of early human uses including archeological sites possibly dating back 10,000 years. Arrow points, pestles, pottery sherds, and rock art sites relay stories of the Mojaves, Chemehuevis, and Paiutes and

provide evidence of these early inhabitants of the Mojave Desert. These lands also served as an important American Indian transportation corridor and trade route in years past, connecting the coastal tribes with tribes along the Colorado River and beyond. Numerous historic sites from early mining, ranching, homesteading, and railroading ventures serve as reminders of the courageous and resilient people that opened the western frontier.



Note: additional maps of the preserve are available at: [insideparkatlas.nps.gov](https://insideparkatlas.nps.gov)