



# Foundation Document Overview

## Olympic National Park

### Washington



#### Contact Information

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## Purpose



photo by Rebecca Stinnett

*The purpose of OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK is to preserve for the benefit, use, and enjoyment of the people, a large wilderness park containing the finest sample of primeval forest of Sitka spruce, western hemlock, Douglas fir, and western red cedar in the entire United States; to provide suitable winter range and permanent protection for the herds of native Roosevelt elk and other wildlife indigenous to the area; to conserve and render available to the people, for recreational use, this outstanding mountainous country, containing numerous glaciers and perpetual snow fields, and a portion of the surrounding verdant forests together with a narrow strip along the beautiful Washington coast.*

## Significance

Significance statements express why Olympic 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.

- Olympic National Park protects several distinctly different and relatively pristine ecosystems that provide both ecological and scenic diversity to the Olympic Peninsula, ranging from wild Pacific coast and islands to densely forested lowlands to the glacier-crowned Olympic Mountains. Views of the mountain range define the landscape for great distances in all directions, and the rugged beauty of the coastline and verdant grandeur of the rain forest have inspired people for generations.
- The ecosystems protected within Olympic National Park contain a unique array of habitats and life forms, resulting from thousands of years of geographic isolation, along with extreme gradients of elevation, temperature, and precipitation. More than a dozen animals and plants on the Olympic Peninsula exist nowhere else in the world, and the park is key to maintaining the populations of these taxa.
- Olympic National Park contains some of the last remaining undisturbed, contiguous aquatic habitat throughout the range of several west coast fish species. The park protects 12 major river basins, more than 3,500 miles of rivers and streams, more than 300 high mountain lakes, and 2 large lowland lakes. As a consequence, the park is entrusted with the stewardship of numerous unique stocks of Pacific salmonids and other native freshwater fish species. Salmon are a keystone species of the park's forest and aquatic ecosystems and are deeply woven into the cultural fabric of the Pacific Northwest.
- One of the largest wilderness areas in the contiguous United States is designated within Olympic National Park. By today's wilderness quality scale, the Daniel J. Evans Wilderness is superb. Few, if any, National Park Service areas in the contiguous United States can approach or surpass its near-pristine nature, grandeur, immensity, and variety of resources, which include glacier-covered mountains, subalpine lakes and meadows, extensive river valleys, old-growth coniferous forests, and the tremendously diverse wild Pacific coastline. The wilderness character of these lands is of inestimable value and among the most precious of the region's resources.

## Significance

- Olympic National Park contains the finest remaining stands of old-growth temperate coniferous forest in the contiguous United States, including one of the finest remaining examples of temperate rain forest in the United States. These extensive forests of ancient and immense trees provide important habitat for complex communities of plants and animals, including a number of imperiled species.
- The Olympic rocky intertidal community is considered to be one of the most complex and diverse shoreline communities in the United States. Olympic National Park includes about 1,400 square miles of intertidal, island, and shoreline habitat and contributes to a large protected landscape of coastal and ocean habitats, including approximately 64 miles of coastline, 52 of which are along designated or potential wilderness.
- Olympic National Park is home to the largest population of Roosevelt elk in its natural environment in the world. Decades of protection from human harvest and habitat manipulation not only have sustained high densities of elk, but also have preserved the natural composition, social structure, and dynamics of this unique western forestland subspecies of elk.
- Olympic National Park manages a variety of cultural resources, from ancient village sites to historic structures, that retain local, regional, or national significance. Eight federally recognized tribes (the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe, Skokomish Indian Tribe, Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe, Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Makah Tribe, Quileute Nation, Hoh Tribe, and Quinault Indian Nation) have, since time immemorial, sustained strong ties to the Olympic Peninsula and what is now the park. Hundreds of archeological and ethnographic sites attest to more than 12,000 years of continuous use and connection to the park landscape. Park resources continue to provide material, spiritual, and cultural sustenance to contemporary descendants as they have for millennia.
- The park serves as a recreational “backyard” for millions of people in the greater Puget Sound and Olympic Peninsula regions, in addition to attracting recreating visitors from across the nation and world.



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## 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.

- **Wilderness Character**
- **Diverse Ecosystems**
- **Ecological Integrity**
- **Night Sky/Natural Soundscapes**
- **Living Laboratory**
- **Diverse and Awe-Inspiring Scenery**
- **Cultural Resources**
- **Enduring Legacy of Human Relationships with the Landscape**
- **Abundant Opportunities for Diverse Visitor Experiences**



photo by Ruth Scott



# Description

Olympic National Park protects 922,651 acres of three distinctly different ecosystems—rugged glacier-capped mountains, more than 60 miles of wild Pacific coast, and magnificent stands of old-growth and temperate rain forest.

The park also provides habitat for more than 1,000 species of native plants, hundreds of species of birds, and 70 species of mammals. Included in these numbers are several federally threatened species—such as the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) and the marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*). The peninsula's isolation has led to the existence of more than a dozen endemic plant and animal species found at Olympic National Park and nowhere else on earth.

The park's 3,500 miles of rivers and streams are home to many species of native freshwater fish and support numerous unique stocks of Pacific salmon and steelhead, including the federally threatened bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), which use both fresh and saltwater during their life cycles.

The 43,000 acres of the park's Pacific coastal strip and offshore islands protect beaches, intertidal areas, and rocky tide pools. The national park boundary extends seaward to the lowest low tide line.

Interwoven throughout this outstanding and diverse landscape is an array of cultural and historic sites that tell the human history of the parklands. Hundreds of archeological sites document more than 12,000 years of human occupation of Olympic National Park lands, and historic sites reveal clues about the 200-year history of exploration, homesteading, and community development in the Pacific Northwest, as well as the continuing evolution of the federal preservation ethic. Museum collections, including ethnographic objects and archival collections, further document the history and cultures that are directly related to the diversity of the Olympic National Park landscapes.

The outstanding attributes of Olympic National Park have led to international recognition. In 1976 the park was designated an International Biosphere Reserve in the Man and the Biosphere Program by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In 1981 the park was designated a World Heritage Site by the World Heritage Convention, joining it to a system of natural and cultural properties that are considered irreplaceable treasures of outstanding universal value. Very few areas in the United States are designated as both a Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site. The exceptional quality of the park is well summarized in the following concluding statement by UNESCO:

*Olympic National Park is the best natural area in the entire Pacific Northwest, with a spectacular coastline, scenic lakes, majestic mountains and glaciers, and magnificent temperate rain forest; these are outstanding examples of ongoing evolution and superlative natural phenomena. It is unmatched in the world.*

Olympic National Park encompasses one of the largest wilderness areas in the contiguous United States—95% of the park (876,447 acres) is designated wilderness, and 378 acres are designated “potential wilderness additions.” The Daniel J. Evans Wilderness provides resource and economic benefits including clean water and air, native plants and wildlife habitat, natural soundscapes, dark night skies as well as recreational opportunities. The wilderness offers more than 600 miles of trails, from easy strolls to challenging paths and hundreds of thousands of remote trailless acres where one can experience solitude and unconfined recreation. Olympic's extraordinary wilderness affords an inspirational legacy of wild America.

