



Foundation Document Overview

Rock Creek Park

District of Columbia



Contact Information

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Description

Rock Creek Park administers 2,749 acres within the District of Columbia and is both an individual unit of the national park system as well as an administrative unit that oversees numerous park sites and resources beyond the original core of Rock Creek Park (US Reservation 339) addressed in the enabling legislation. The park administers a total of 99 additional areas, which include the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, the Old Stone House, part of the Civil War Defenses of Washington (CWDW), Dumbarton Oaks Park, Meridian Hill Park, and Glover Archbold Park. These sites were not included in the original enabling legislation of the park but were authorized for their own unique qualities (see appendix A for enabling legislation and a list of sites and resources managed by Rock Creek Park). This document contains analysis with specific guidance for planning and management of Rock Creek Park and its administrative park sites. The primary legislated and nonlegislated park sites are listed below. The remainder of managed sites are triangles, circles, and squares.

Legislated Park Unit Managed by Rock Creek Park

- Rock Creek Park

Associated Park Sites Managed by Rock Creek Park

- Battleground National Cemetery
- Civil War Defenses of Washington
- Old Stone House
- Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway
- Glover Archbold Park
- Dumbarton Oaks Park
- Montrose Park
- Meridian Hill Park
- Georgetown Waterfront Park
- Klingle Valley Parkway
- Piney Branch Parkway
- Whitehaven Parkway
- Rabaut Park
- Soapstone Valley
- Potomac Palisades Parkway
- Beach Drive
- Normanstone Parkway
- Pinehurst Tributary
- Melvin Hazen Park
- Woodley Park
- Little Forest
- Bryce Park
- More than 40 circles, squares, and triangles around the city



Brief Description of Rock Creek Park and Associated Sites

Rock Creek Park. Rock Creek Park itself was first established in 1890 to protect the natural and historical landscape of the Rock Creek Valley in Washington, DC. Stretching from the Maryland state line to the National Zoo, Rock Creek Park exists as a green oasis amidst the dense urban development of the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. The park was one of the first designated federal park units, and among these early parks was unique due to its proximity to an urban center. Its location makes it highly accessible for city residents and visitors alike to experience a tranquil natural setting for its own sake or in pursuit of any number of recreational activities. As stated in the enabling legislation, Rock Creek Park is “perpetually dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States,” which included the construction of driving roads and trails for horses and pedestrians, while preserving the park’s “timber, animals, and curiosities . . . in their natural condition, as nearly as possible.”

The main natural feature of Rock Creek Park is a 9.6-mile segment of Rock Creek. In the years after the initial park area was designated, several tributary land parcels were incrementally added to the park, which combine to protect more than 2,000 acres of the Rock Creek watershed. This area protects a natural landscape consisting of deciduous forests and meadows, which provide habitat for many plant and animal species, including fish, amphibians, mammals, and 180 species of birds. Wetlands and floodplains along Rock Creek and its tributaries are home to a large number of plant and animal species, and represent an important component of the biodiversity in the park.

Human presence in what is now Rock Creek Park spans thousands of years. The park includes a number of significant archeological sites, such as the Piney Branch Quarry Site, which provided important evidence in the debate over the history of human presence in the Americas, and others that continue to be discovered and studied. Sites connected to more recent human presence in the Rock Creek valley include Peirce Mill, representative of the active milling industry in the valley in the mid-19th century, and a number of sites related to the defense of Washington, DC, during the Civil War.

Description

In addition to protection of important natural and cultural resources, Rock Creek Park offers an impressively wide range of opportunities for active recreation, education, and quiet refuge from the surrounding urban environment. Park visitors can walk, run, bicycle, ride on horseback, drive, or simply relax and enjoy a quiet natural atmosphere. Concessioners provide lessons and rentals for popular activities such as kayaking, canoeing, rowing, paddleboarding, and bicycling. The park also features facilities for more organized activities, including ball fields, a golf course, and developed play areas. The park nature center hosts scheduled interpretive programs, including astronomical programs in the planetarium. Park staff also guide interpretive walks and talks throughout the park. The Carter Barron Amphitheatre provides a range of music and theater performances, offering an exceptional opportunity for cultural enrichment. All of these opportunities facilitate an exceptionally close connection between the park and surrounding community.

Civil War Defenses of Washington. Of the 19 surviving features of the system of defenses termed the Civil War Defenses of Washington, Rock Creek Park administers 9: Forts Bunker Hill, Totten, Slocum, Stevens, DeRussy, Reno, Bayard, and Battery Kemble. In addition, Battleground National Cemetery is also administered by the park. The other ten defense sites administered by the National Park Service are part of the George Washington Memorial Parkway and National Capital Parks East. These sites came under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service under the authority of Public Law 71-284, the Capper-Cramton Act. Most of the forts had previously been under federal ownership, and during the first half of the 20th century, jurisdiction passed through several governing bodies within the federal government until they came to the National Park Service.



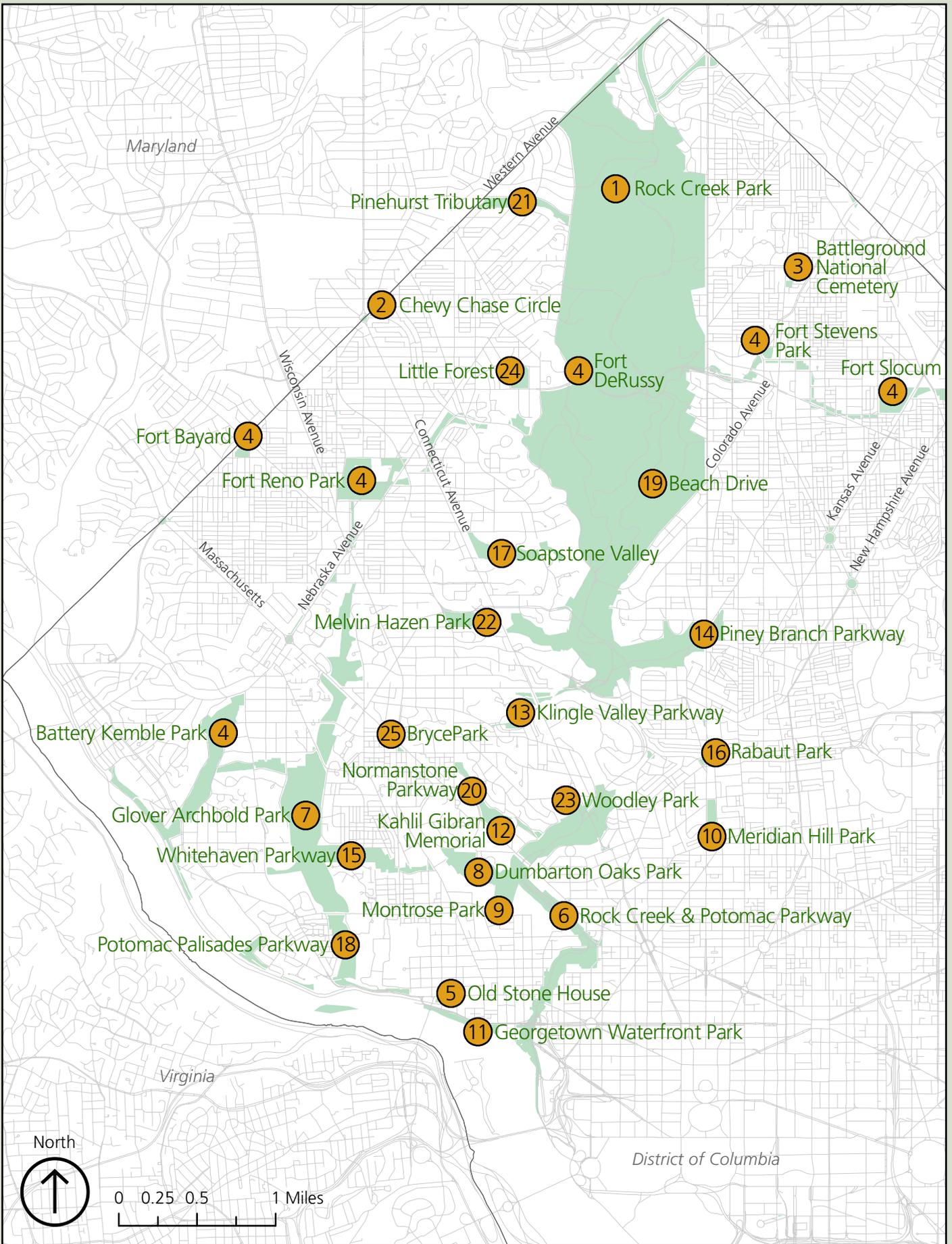
The Civil War Defenses of Washington were constructed as a circle of fortifications on the high ground surrounding Washington, DC, to protect the city during the Civil War. The city had not been threatened militarily since the War of 1812, and was initially undefended against Confederate incursion as the Civil War began in 1861. This network of fortifications made Washington, DC, one of the most heavily fortified cities in the world and played an important role in deterring any Confederate plans to attack the nation's capital.

Beginning as early as 1872, several plans called for creating a continuous thread of public parks surrounding the city where the defenses had once kept watch. The 1902 McMillan Commission was a comprehensive planning document that called for the improvement of District of Columbia parks, including linking the city's Civil War fort-parks via a grand drive. Government acquisition of the Civil War defenses began between the establishment of Fort Dupont in 1916 and the work relief programs of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s, providing an impetus for park design and reconstruction efforts at sites such as Fort Stevens, Fort Stanton, Bunker Hill, and others. Today, each of the historic fort sites plays an important role in its local community, both as an area for recreation and as a place to learn about the history of the Civil War in Washington, DC.

The Old Stone House. The Old Stone House is one of the oldest standing structures on its original foundation in Washington, DC, and one of the last surviving examples of 18th century architecture in the city. The house is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is also a contributing resource to the Georgetown Historic District.

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway occupies the gorge and rim of the lower Rock Creek Valley and a stretch of land along the Potomac riverfront. The parkway was built between 1923 and 1936, with some of the labor supplied by the Works Progress Administration during the later stages of construction, and was intended to replace a polluted river valley with a picturesque drive and bridle path linking Rock Creek Park to the National Mall area. The parkway is one of the best-preserved examples of the earliest design of motor parkway development.

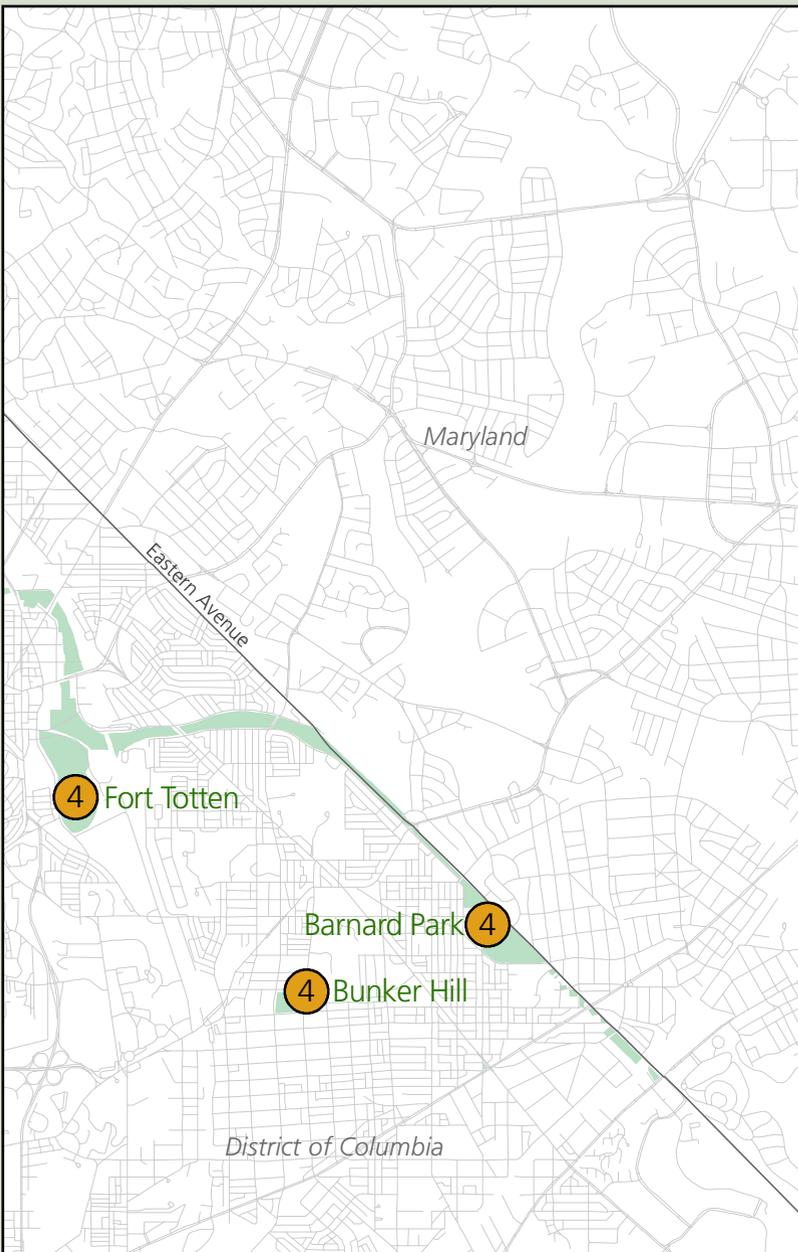
Dumbarton Oaks Park. Dumbarton Oaks Park, part of the estate of Mildred and Robert Bliss, was donated to the National Park Service in 1940. The naturalistic garden on the grounds was designed to create the illusion of country life within the city, and is considered one of the most important works by notable landscape architect Beatrix Farrand.



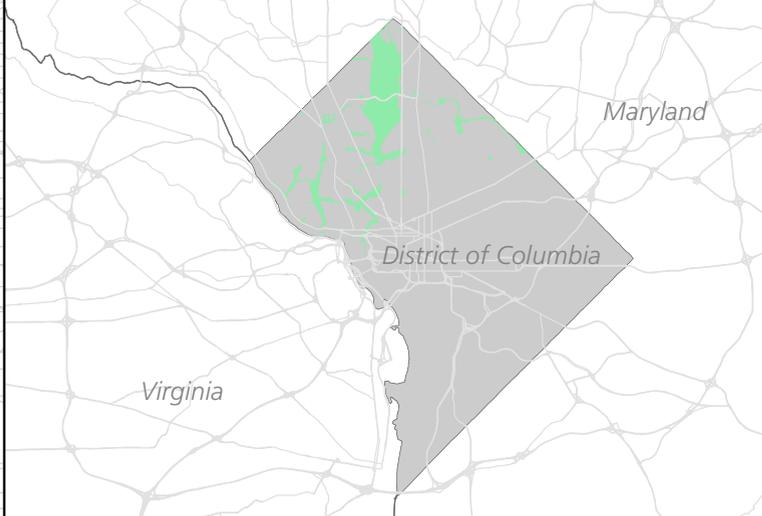
Rock Creek Park

District of Columbia

- 1 Rock Creek Park
- 2 Chevy Chase Circle
- 3 Battleground National Cemetery
- 4 Civil War Defenses of Washington
- 5 Old Stone House
- 6 Rock Creek & Potomac Parkway
- 7 Glover Archbold Park
- 8 Dumbarton Oaks Park
- 9 Montrose Park
- 10 Meridian Hill Park
- 11 Georgetown Waterfront Park
- 12 Kahlil Gibran Memorial
- 13 Klinge Valley Parkway
- 14 Piney Branch Parkway
- 15 Whitehaven Parkway
- 16 Rabaut Park
- 17 Soapstone Valley
- 18 Potomac Palisades Parkway
- 19 Beach Drive
- 20 Normanstone Parkway
- 21 Pinehurst Tributary
- 22 Melvin Hazen Park
- 23 Woodley Park
- 24 Little Forest
- 25 Bryce Park



Rock Creek Park Overview



Purpose



Significance

Significance statements express why Rock Creek 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.

1. The core of Rock Creek Park, known as US Reservation 339, is one of the oldest and largest natural urban parks in the United States, and was established in 1890 as a result of the 19th century conservation movement to preserve natural scenic areas in the United States.
2. Rock Creek, its tributaries, and its springs, sustain a variety of fish and aquatic species, including the endangered Hay's Spring amphipod, found nowhere else in the world.
3. Rock Creek Park preserves archeological resources that document 5,000 years of human history, including the nationally notable Piney Branch Quarry Site, which expanded knowledge and understanding of prehistoric human activities in the Washington, DC, area.
4. Rock Creek Park preserves nearly 3,000 acres of federal land within a highly urbanized area, including thousands of acres of forested habitat that provide protection and management for a diversity of plant and animal species.
5. Meridian Hill Park is a national historic landmark and is a nationally significant example of Neoclassicist American park design in the United States.
6. The Old Stone House, circa 1765, is one of the oldest structures in Washington, DC, preserving an example of mid-18th century residential and commercial architecture in Georgetown.

One of the first federal parks, established in 1890 for the benefit of the people of the United States, ROCK CREEK PARK preserves the natural, archeological, and historic resources of the Rock Creek Valley and areas of northern Washington, DC, while providing visitors with compatible recreational opportunities and a respite within the nation's capital.



Significance

7. Rock Creek Park manages 9 of the 19 NPS-managed sites of the Civil War Defenses of Washington. These defenses protect and interpret the remnants of historic Civil War forts while preserving a corridor of forest and natural scenery as part of a comprehensive system of parks for recreation, preservation of substantial tracts of forests, and protection of source water in and around the nation's capital.

Additional significance topics have been identified for the Civil War Defenses of Washington managed by Rock Creek Park:

- The scale, inventive design, and speed of construction of the Civil War Defenses of Washington resulted in a system of forts, batteries, and rifle trenches that effectively deterred the invasion of the nation's capital by the Confederate Army during the Civil War, and are a tangible reminder of the capital city's rich Civil War history.
- The defensive position of the forts on hills surrounding the city provides an outstanding opportunity to explore and understand the strategic interaction between the environment and cultural history.
- The significant natural features and processes preserved by the Civil War Defenses of Washington provide viable corridors for both plant and wildlife diversity and exceptional recreational opportunities, which help create a healthier natural and human environment in the nation's capital.
- The Civil War Defenses of Washington were havens of safety for the many contrabands and formerly enslaved Africans who fled to Washington during the Civil War and influenced African American settlement patterns in the nation's capital. ("Contraband" is a historical term that refers to individuals who escaped slavery and sought refuge behind Union lines).
- The McMillan Commission's 1902 plan, as realized when the acquisition of fort sites began in the 1920s, represented visionary urban planning efforts for public recreation and preserved a scenic backdrop for the nation's capital.
- The green space and extensive trail network protected by the Civil War Defenses of Washington help to shape, strengthen, and provide identity for communities in the city through recreation, cultural events, and neighborhood activities.



8. Battleground National Cemetery, established in 1864 following the Battle of Fort Stevens, is the final resting place of 41 Union soldiers who fought in the battle and serves as a memorial to honor their sacrifice.
9. Once part of the larger Dumbarton Oaks estate, the 27-acre Dumbarton Oaks Park is an outstanding example of the work of pioneering landscape architect Beatrix Farrand, who designed the naturalistic garden.
10. Montrose Park, the first public park in Georgetown, was designed by notable Washington, DC, architect Horace Peaslee and landscape architect George Burnap.
11. The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, authorized in 1913, was the first parkway in a metropolitan region and is an excellent example of early parkway design.
12. Georgetown Waterfront Park is an excellent example of a successful public-private partnership, working for nearly 20 years to reclaim a former industrial area and complete the greenway of open space stretching along the Potomac River from Cumberland, Maryland, to Mount Vernon, Virginia.
13. Glover Archbold Park, a forested urban area that became parkland through donations in 1924 and expanded with additional purchases through 1943, is an important component of the park system that creates a critical recreational greenway from upper Northwest Washington, DC, to the Potomac River, and commemorates the role of Charles Carroll Glover in the establishment of Rock Creek Park.

Fundamental Resources and Values and Other Important 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.

- **Rock Creek and Tributaries**
- **Ecological Communities**
- **Cultural Landscapes**
- **Opportunities for Recreation and Respite**
- **Connections to Community**
- **Historic Structures**
- **Civil War Defenses of Washington**

Rock Creek 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.

- **Memorialization and Commemoration**
- **First Amendment Rights Area at Meridian Hill Park**
- **Archeological 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.

- **Evolving American Ideas of Parks**
- **Window for Understanding the Natural World**
- **5,000 Years of Dynamic Cultural History**
- **Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Wellbeing**
- **Civil War Defenses of Washington**

