



Foundation Document Overview

Saguaro National Park

Arizona



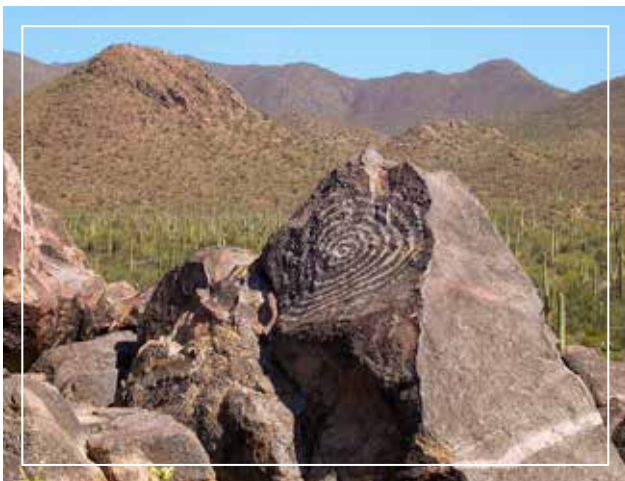
Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of Saguaro National Park is to preserve and protect saguaro cacti; diverse biotic communities (including the Sonoran Desert, associated mountain ecosystems, and Rincon Creek); cultural and archeological features; and scientific, scenic, and wilderness values. The park provides opportunities for research, education, and public enjoyment, and strives to protect its resources from the effects of the encroachment from urbanization and development.



Significance

Significance statements express why Saguaro 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.

- The saguaro is the tallest cactus in the United States and is the namesake of Saguaro National Park. Its distinctive form is recognized worldwide as an iconic symbol of the American Southwest. The Sonoran Desert ecosystem, represented within the park, contains superb saguaro stands that are easily accessed by visitors.
- Saguaro National Park contains the largest roadless sky island in the American Southwest. Encompassing a wide range of elevations, the Rincon Mountains support extraordinary biodiversity within a small geographic area. Within a few miles, the species within the park range from desert dwellers such as Gila monsters, desert tortoise, and saguaro cacti to montane residents such as American black bear, spotted owl, and Douglas fir.
- Saguaro National Park preserves one of the largest concentrations of rare and distinct aquatic micro-habitats such as *tinajas*, seeps, and springs, in the desert Southwest. These habitats, along with the riparian corridor of Rincon Creek, support rare and special status species such as lowland leopard frog, yellow-billed cuckoo, gray hawk, and southwestern willow flycatcher, as well as plant species uncommon to the desert, including sycamore and ash.
- Saguaro National Park has a long human history and legacy of scientific interest and research and serves as an exceptional living laboratory for studying ecological and geological processes as well as the environmental consequences of climate change.
- Saguaro National Park's close proximity to a large urban community provides exceptional access to wild places in which visitors can experience wilderness and scenic views.

Interpretive Themes

- Saguario National Park contains a rich concentration of cultural resources that tell the history of continuous and diverse human occupation in the Southwest from prehistoric to modern times. The landscape contains evidence of how people adapt, modify, and thrive in an arid environment, and is an important part of the cultural heritage of associated American Indian tribes, Hispanic populations, and other groups.

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.

- Saguario Cacti
- Sonoran Desert and Sky Island Ecosystems Integrity
- Rincon Creek and Aquatic Habitats
- Cultural Resources
- Wilderness Stewardship in an Urban Area
- Urban Area Interface and Regional Identity
- Clean Air
- Living Laboratory



Saguario National 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.

- Geologic Resources

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.

- **Saguario Cacti:** The saguario cactus, known worldwide as the symbol of the American West, engages our imagination and scientific curiosity with its majestic size, shape, and age while intriguing us with its similarity to the human silhouette.
- **The Land and the People:** Understanding the impacts and changes created by thousands of years of human interaction with the land has enormous potential for multicultural, historical, and scientific understanding that promotes protection and preservation of cultural and natural resources.
- **Wilderness Stewardship in an Urban Area:** The proximity of Saguario National Park to metropolitan Tucson provides convenient opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to enjoy natural areas and designated wilderness and to participate in park stewardship.
- **Ecosystem Diversity:** The diversity of Saguario National Park provides opportunities to understand the ecology of the Sonoran Desert, Madrean woodlands, sky islands, and riparian areas, and how they influence the distribution, stability, and other characteristics of biological species and communities.
- **Adaptations and Environmental Change:** The plants and animals of Saguario National Park have developed a variety of fascinating physical features, physiological adaptations, and special behaviors to adapt and survive in the arid environment of the Sonoran Desert. The park serves as a living laboratory and benchmark allowing us to monitor and measure environmental change, the understanding of which may be critical to present and future generations.
- **Geology:** A variety of complex geological processes created the landforms of the park and the surrounding region and provides opportunities to explore how underlying geology influences the living world, including all of us.

Description

Saguaro National Park was established by President Herbert Hoover on March 1, 1933. Originally named Saguaro National Monument, the name was changed to Saguaro National Park by an act of Congress on October 14, 1994 (see appendix A). Wilderness was designated in 1976, and boundary changes have taken place in 1961, 1976, 1991, and 1994. The park has 91,442.42 acres with 3,916.35 acres in nonfederal ownership and 87,526.07 acres in federal ownership. Designated wilderness includes 71,400 acres. Lands have been added to the park since wilderness designation in 1976.

This mountainous park has two districts—the Rincon Mountain District east of Tucson and the Tucson Mountain District west of Tucson. Both districts of the park are in Pima County, Arizona, and are separated by the City of Tucson. The Rincon Mountain District is bordered on the east and portions of the north and south by the Coronado National Forest. Residential developments border sections of the western, southwestern, and northwestern boundaries of this district. The Tucson Mountain District is bordered primarily by Pima County's Tucson Mountain Park on the south and private residential development on the north, east, and west.

Saguaro National Park protects a superb example of the Sonoran Desert ecosystem, featuring exceptional stands of saguaro cacti, important wildlife habitat, critical riparian areas, and associated mountains. The park also protects

significant cultural resources, including national register-listed or -eligible archeological resources, places important to American Indian cultural traditions, and historic structures.

A visit to Saguaro National Park allows visitors to come in close contact with one of the most interesting and unusual collections of desert life in the United States. Visitors of all ages are fascinated and enchanted by the desert giants, saguaro cacti, especially their many interesting and complex interrelationships with other desert life. The park provides exceptional opportunities for visitors to experience solitude and discover nature on their own, to educate people through close interaction with the environment, and to see the outstanding and diverse scenic features of this classic desert landscape.

Annual recreational visitation to the park has averaged around 700,000 in the last decade. The typical peak period of visitation at Saguaro is January through March. The months with the lowest visitation levels are July and August. The heat of the desert makes the summer months less desirable for many of the activities offered at the park. Most of the park's visitors participate in day use activities such as hiking, walking, horseback riding, scenic driving, and interpretive and educational events. Due to the proximity of the park to Tucson, a large number of Saguaro's visitors are local to the area and have visited the park many times.

