



# Foundation Document Overview

## Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

California



### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS preserve and provide for the enjoyment of present and future generations the wonders, curiosities, and evolving ecological processes of the southern Sierra Nevada—including the largest giant sequoia trees in the world, free-flowing wild and scenic rivers, and the heart of the vast High Sierra wilderness.*



## Significance

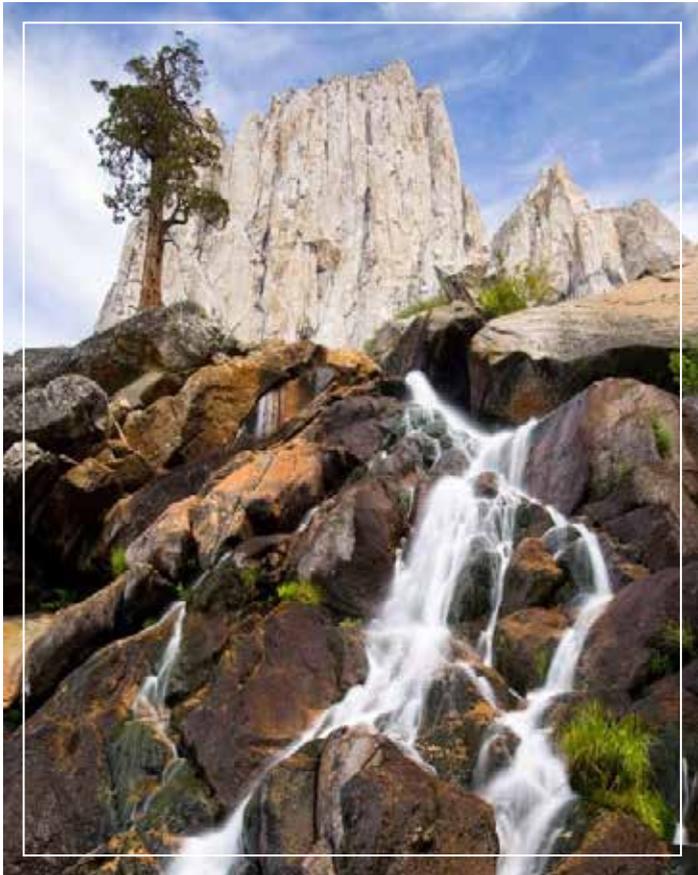
Significance statements express why Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are 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.

- Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks contain more than 40% of the world's giant sequoia grove area, including the four largest living trees on earth.
- Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks contain an extraordinary continuum of diverse ecosystems, from foothill woodlands and shrublands to alpine tundra. Intact ecosystems range from 1,370 to 14,494 feet (418 to 4,418 meters) in elevation, the greatest vertical relief of any protected area in the lower 48 states.
- Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks contain a remarkable concentration of diverse and scenic geologic features, such as deep glacially carved canyons, an extensive cave-rich landscape, and towering alpine peaks, including 9 of the 12 highest summits in California; and Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the US outside of Alaska.
- The water resources of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, which include free-flowing wild and scenic rivers and the highest elevation headwaters in California, have profound and far-reaching ecological, recreational, and societal value.
- More than 800,000 acres of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are designated wilderness, forming the core of the largest expanse of contiguous wilderness in California, which is visited and valued by people from around the world.
- Sequoia National Park was created by a conservation movement that continues to influence the protection of irreplaceable scenic landscapes and places. Today, the parks protect the record of this history, of park management, and of earlier human uses extending back 8,000 years.
- Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks attract visitors from around the world by providing some of the most personally challenging and transformative recreational opportunities in the Sierra Nevada while also providing a wide array of inspirational, educational, and sensory experiences accessible to visitors of all ages and abilities.
- Among our nation's earliest protected areas, the history of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks is rooted in pioneering stewardship. This legacy inspires a culture of leadership, continuous learning, and innovation.

## 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.

- Giant Sequoia Trees.
- Ecological Diversity.
- Scenic Landscapes.
- Caves and Karst Systems.
- Water Resources.
- Wilderness Character.
- Protecting and Sharing of Human History.
- Promoting Continuous Learning and Innovation.
- Opportunities for a Range of Experiences.



## 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.

- Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks protect clean air, scenic landscapes, ecosystems, and natural processes that are of immeasurable recreational, educational, scientific, and philosophical value.
- These parks contain an extraordinary range of environments and habitats, resulting in a high level of biodiversity, due to the extensive topographic relief and unique geology of the southern Sierra Nevada.
- Giant sequoias grow naturally only on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada and are the largest, and some of the oldest trees in the world.
- The southern Sierra Nevada was created by, and continues to be shaped by, powerful geologic and hydrologic forces that have generated unique, impressive landscapes.
- Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks protect the heart of California's largest wilderness, an area valued for its naturalness, untrammelled and undeveloped characteristics, and for its outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined types of recreation.
- The southern Sierra Nevada is being subjected to unprecedented anthropogenic pressures, such as air pollution and climate change, which are altering ecosystems and may affect many of the significant features and resources of the parks.
- Different people have used, valued, and influenced the landscape and resources of the parks in changing ways over time.



# Description

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks preserve and protect the largest and most pristine portion of the southern Sierra Nevada range. Founded in 1890, Sequoia is the second-oldest park in the system, joined in 1940 by Kings Canyon, created expressly as a “wilderness park.” Since 1943, the two parks have been administered jointly with one superintendent overseeing the management of both parks.

The parks protect more than 865,964 acres of land (404,063 acres in Sequoia and 461,901 acres in Kings Canyon) and also showcase a remarkable range of elevations from 1,370 feet in the Sierra foothills to the 14,494 foot peak of Mount Whitney. A majority of the lands within the parks are designated as wilderness, which is defined under the Wilderness Act. As of 2015, approximately 808,078 acres were designated wilderness (93.3% of the parks), and 29,516 acres are proposed wilderness, and 212 additional acres are potential wilderness (totaling approximately 96.75% of the park acreage).

As Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks protect the largest elevation gradient in the lower 48 states, these parks contain a great diversity of wildlife and plant species. At the time of this publication, there are 12 amphibian species (11

native), 201 bird species (192 native), 11 fish species (5 native), 72 mammal species (68 native), 21 reptile species (all native), and 1,551 plant species (1,355 native), excluding species of unknown status that potentially may occur in the parks. Among the documented species are the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, the northern distinct population segment of the mountain yellow-legged frog (which are currently listed as federally endangered), and the Little Kern golden trout and Yosemite toad (which are currently listed as federally threatened). Two species are candidates for federal listing—the Pacific fisher and the whitebark pine.

The most notable organisms found in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are the giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) which are the largest living trees in the world. There are a total of 39 giant sequoia groves in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, which account for roughly 40% of the area of native sequoia groves in the world.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks contain three main watersheds (Kings, Kaweah, and Kern) and two lesser watersheds (South Fork of the San Joaquin and North Fork

of the Tule). Among these, there are several waterways designated as wild or scenic under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (PL 90-542, as amended; 16 USC 1271-1287) and several determined to be eligible and suitable for designation, and therefore, protected to preserve their values in accordance with NPS policies. These waters are highly valuable to the central valley of California for drinking water, power generation, and agriculture.

To date, approximately 275 caves have been found in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. The number continues to rise, making the parks home to one of the most extensive cave-rich landscapes in the western United States. Caves within the parks include: Lilburn, California’s longest cave; caves with endemic cave-adapted species, such as Clough and Kaweah; caves with rare and fragile mineral resources, such as Hurricane Crawl and Ursa Minor; and Crystal Cave, the most popular commercial tour cave in the state.

Cover photo: David Dinette

