

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wind Cave National Park  
South Dakota



# Foundation Document

## Wind Cave National Park

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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*Wind Cave National Park Foundation Document*,  
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## Purpose



*The purpose of Wind Cave National Park is to protect the unique Wind Cave resources and preserve and enhance the mixed-grass prairie and native wildlife, while providing for the enjoyment of the public.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why the park's resources and values are important enough to warrant national park system designation. These statements are directly related to the park's purpose, are substantiated by data or consensus, and reflect the most current scientific or scholarly inquiry and cultural perceptions, which may have changed since the park's establishment.

**Exceptional Cave Feature.** Wind Cave is one of the longest, oldest, and most complex caves in the world and contains the largest concentration of boxwork, a rare cave formation first described at Wind Cave.

**Paleokarst Geology.** Wind Cave is one of the best places in the world to view remnants of ancient sediment-filled caves (i.e., paleokarst).

**A Spiritual Landscape.** Wind Cave is considered a sacred site for many American Indian tribes. This setting gives a sense of life and spirituality that fosters respect, cultural understanding, and an appreciation for the diverse cultures that have cared for this special place.

**Native Wildlife.** Wind Cave National Park supports one of the most intact prairie wildlife communities in North America, with pronghorn, mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, prairie dogs, mountain lion, endangered black-footed ferret, and genetically diverse and brucellosis-free American bison.

**Black Hills/Prairie Edge.** Wind Cave National Park supports one of the last remaining examples of mixed-grass prairie, ponderosa pine, and riparian plant communities found in the Black Hills.

**Exceptional Natural Settings.** Wind Cave National Park provides one of the most expansive unobstructed beautiful natural vistas, night skies, and natural soundscapes found in the Black Hills region.



# Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those that warrant primary consideration during planning and management because they are critical to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance. Fundamental resources and values may include features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, etc. If the fundamental resources and values are degraded, the purpose of the park and its significance are jeopardized.

The fundamental resources and values of Wind Cave National Park are

- **Cave and Karst Features.** More than 134 miles of passages have been explored and mapped at Wind Cave, yet studies suggest this is only a fraction of the cave's potential extent. Ongoing surveys are documenting an average of 2-4 more miles of previously unknown passages each year. Over 43 known backcountry caves exist within the park as well. The sheer magnitude of the cave system rivals that found anywhere else in the world.
- **Native Wildlife.** Wind Cave National Park is the only place in the world with a cohabitating/coexisting resident community of pronghorn, mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, prairie dogs, mountain lion, endangered black-footed ferret, and genetically diverse and brucellosis-free American bison. Through the efforts of park management, these animals are important to the ecosystem and through their existence they continue to figure as an important part of Indian American tradition and stories.
- **Native Vegetation (Mixed-Grass Prairie Communities).** The park is exceptional as it includes a transition zone of complex and diverse ecosystems from the Black Hills to the Great Plains. The ability of mixed-grass prairie, ponderosa pine, and riparian plant communities to function under natural processes and over a large area is rare.
- **Water Resources Including Hydrology.** The interaction of surface and subsurface water flows are vital to the biodiversity within Wind Cave, and are not yet fully understood. Fluctuations within the water table and surface drainage patterns are complex and greatly influence associated ecosystems.
- **Exploration and Discovery of Wind Cave.** The first systematic explorer of Wind Cave, Alvin McDonald, set into motion a chain of events that eventually led to later exploration efforts, and eventually to the establishment of the first national park to protect a cave. Recreational and scientific exploration of the cave by both visitors and staff continues to this day.

# Other Resources and Values

The other resources and values of Wind Cave National Park are

- **Origin Story.** Some Great Plains tribes consider Wind Cave the place where their ancestors emerged from the earth, and where the bison, which they depended on for sustenance, also emerged.
- **Viewsheds/Vistas.** The viewshed and unobstructed long vistas of the park provide a backdrop for viewing the extraordinary abundance of native animal and plant communities. From them, a visitor can visualize the park as it might have appeared in prehistoric times, before the advent of modern development.
- **Solitude/Soundscapes.** Wind Cave provides exceptional opportunities for natural sounds and silence, and visitors can readily find such places within the park to experience solitude and reflection.
- **Paleontology.** The park contains significant paleontological resources spanning the geologic record from the Paleozoic to the Holocene (360 million to 2000 years ago).
- **Archeology.** Many archeological sites exist within the park, including one of the oldest archeological rock shelter sites in the Black Hills, dating back nearly 7,000 years.
- **Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes.** Wind Cave National Park protects 29 structures listed in the national register, most of which comprise the Wind Cave Administrative and Utility Area Historic District.



# Description of Wind Cave National Park

Wind Cave National Park protects one of the world's longest and most complex caves along with 33, 851 acres of mixed-grass prairie, ponderosa pine forest, and associated wildlife. The cave is well known for its outstanding display of boxwork, an unusual cave formation composed of thin calcite fins resembling honeycombs. The park's mixed-grass prairie is part of a shrinking national native grassland resource and is home to native wildlife such as bison, elk, pronghorn, mule deer, coyotes, prairie dogs, and black-footed ferrets. The park is located in the Black Hills and has a complex and changing history of human occupation extending back centuries to prehistoric times.

