



# Foundation Document Overview

## Yucca House National Monument

Colorado



### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*YUCCA HOUSE NATIONAL MONUMENT  
preserves an unexcavated 13th century  
Ancestral Pueblo community center of  
the Montezuma Valley in southwest  
Colorado that offers opportunities  
for archeological research and  
interpretation.*

## Significance

Significance statements express why Yucca House National Monument 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.

- Existing archeological models and technology, combined with the unexcavated state of Yucca House National Monument, provides uncommon opportunities for investigating and interpreting social dynamics, hierarchy, ceremonial spaces, and migrations of the 13th century Ancestral Pueblo community.
- Yucca House is an example of a valley Ancestral Pueblo community center that includes a distinctive mix of architectural features suggesting different groups occupied the same site contemporaneously.



## 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.

- **Yucca House Archeological**

**Landscape** – The central component of the Yucca House archeological landscape consists of an Ancestral Pueblo village or community center exhibiting a Chacoan great house (Upper House), kiva with enclosing plaza (Lower House) and associated structures and features.

Other important contributing features of the archeological landscape include the site's physiographic location on the Montezuma Valley floor, expansive 360-degree views, proximity to the primary routes of north/south travel (i.e., trails), and the springs and other significant water resources that supported the community.



- **Research Values of Yucca House** – Because Yucca House remains largely unexcavated, the site holds outstanding potential to answer key questions regarding the development of communities that lived in the Montezuma Valley and the broader Four Corners region. Further research at the site may also illuminate the relationship of Yucca House with other contemporary sites in the region.

Yucca House National Monument 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.

- **Yucca House Museum Collections and Archives**
- **Scenic Views**
- **Natural Resources**
- **Tribal Significance**

## 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.

- **Yucca House in the Context of a Broader Archeological Region.** Archeological evidence and the site's strategic location suggest the builders of Yucca House maintained vibrant links to contemporary communities throughout the region.
- **Yucca House Provides Insights into Social Hierarchy and Structure.** The building materials and distinctive architectural features of Yucca House reveal the ingenuity and artistry of the Ancestral Pueblo—offering insights into social hierarchy and structure.
- **Fertile Field for Future Investigation.** Yucca House may hold the keys to many unanswered questions surrounding the tumultuous 13th century in the Montezuma Valley. Investigative techniques of today and the future may offer glimpses into that era.
- **Yucca House Exemplifies the Importance of Private Stewardship.** The vision of local landowners helped Yucca House become a national monument in 1919 and retain its integrity, providing an early example of private stewardship for nationally significant resources—actions from which we all benefit.
- **Living in an Arid Environment.** The Aztec Spring on the Yucca House site provided a reliable water source, which contributed to the success of the prehistoric community and continues to be a valuable water source for local and migrating wildlife, exemplifying the importance of a stable water source shared by all living things.

## Description

Yucca House National Monument is a prehistoric ruin generally referred to as “valley pueblo” located on the eastern slope of Sleeping Ute Mountain in Montezuma County, southwestern Colorado.

Archeologists classify Yucca House as belonging to the Classic or Great Pueblo Stage of the Mesa Verde Branch of the Ancestral Pueblo Cultural Tradition. Site chronology includes an initial occupation ranging from AD 1050–1150 followed by a later occupation from AD 1225–1300. Overall, Yucca House is composed of a multistory masonry pueblo that includes a well-preserved Great House, multiple towers in small plazas, a bi-wall structure, a significant number of kivas, and a well-delineated ceremonial plaza containing a great kiva, partially enclosed by an imposing wall just to the north.

Because of the size of Yucca House and the physiographic location at the southern end of Montezuma Valley, archeologists and historians surmise the site played an important role along a trade route of undetermined extent. It likely connected large and small centers throughout the Colorado Plateau with the large and small villages in the Montezuma Valley and is considered to be the “gateway” to Montezuma Valley. The site offers unparalleled potential to add significant information to the understanding of the interactions among three major groups of the Ancestral Pueblo—the Mesa Verde, Chaco, and Kayenta branches.

Because of its significance as an excellent example of a valley pueblo, Yucca House was made a national monument by a Presidential Proclamation of Woodrow Wilson on December 18, 1919. In 1996, a 24-acre parcel of land owned by Ms. Hallie Ismay since 1948 was donated to the monument for the purposes of including important portions of the Yucca House archeological site and providing areas for potential visitor access and services. The 33.6-acre monument is managed by the staff of nearby Mesa Verde National Park. The National Park Service allows the public to visit Yucca House National Monument freely and independently.

