

Theme

G U I D E

A guide to the thematic approach to interpretation used by
the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service

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Theme Guide

National Park Service Interpretive Planners Richard Kohen and Kim Sikoryak have developed a clear and compelling description of thematic interpretation — the communication framework used by NPS interpreters to present information and ideas to the public about the places that embody America’s natural and cultural heritage.

This guide contains definitions and examples of park significance statements and interpretive themes, and explains how interpretive themes are written, organized, and used in a thematic interpretation framework.

For interpreters pursuing certification through the NPS Interpretive Development Program, this guide augments the foundational module (Module 101) and many others; it enhances understanding of the IDP and its application to daily interpretive operations and comprehensive interpretive planning.

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Theme development for effective interpretation

Welcome

This publication describes the thematic approach to interpretation used by the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service. The principles herein provide an effective framework for strategically organizing and delivering interpretive services that achieve the desired outcome of interpretation. The National Park Service defines the desired outcome of interpretation — interpretation’s mission — as *increasing visitor understanding and appreciation of the significances inherent in park resources*¹. Interpretive services provided to the public offer *opportunities for people to forge their own intellectual and emotional connections to the ideas and meanings inherent in the resources of parks*.²

When discussing the idea of this publication with interpreters, we have been consistently asked to:

- Describe thematic interpretation in detail, with many real-life examples;
- Apply the framework of thematic interpretation to the work performed by *interpretive managers* so that the development, maintenance, and operation of the interpretive program is accomplished effectively and efficiently, better achieving the desired outcomes of the program; and
- Apply the framework of thematic interpretation to the work performed by *frontline interpreters* so that their abilities to effectively and efficiently design and deliver interpretive services is enhanced, better achieving desired outcomes.

We have endeavored to address these concerns. Please write or call us if you would like to offer ideas about improving the way thematic interpretation is presented in this publication. Contact information appears at the back of this publication.

A few definitions

Although *park* is used herein as a generic reference to National Park System sites, this process is equally applicable to museums, nature centers, zoos, historic districts, state and local parks, and other sites that preserve and interpret natural and cultural heritage.

We define *visitors* as *all people who experience the park’s interpretive program*. This includes interaction with the park in a personal way — whether people are physically in the park or visiting remotely through virtual technology, other media, or curriculum-based instruction. *Visitors* includes the concepts of publics, customers, audiences, tourists, students, web-surfers, life-long learners, etc.

The term *interpretation* is used inclusively. It includes interpretive services

¹ A paraphrase of Long-Term Mission Goal IIb, *National Park Service Strategic Plan, 2000-2005*, based on the Government Performance And Results Act of 1994.

² A paraphrase of Module 101 — *Fulfilling the NPS Mission: The Process of Interpretation*, Interpretive Development Program (IDP), National Park Service.

delivered personally, non-personal interpretive services (media), and services occurring in an educational setting (usually curriculum-driven but not always, including lesson plans, traveling trunks, self-guiding materials, long-distance learning materials, etc.).

Using this guide

This guide is composed of narrative sections describing thematic interpretation, statements of park significances, primary interpretive themes, and subthemes. Interspersed with the above are actual sets of significance statements and primary interpretive themes from large and small parks, in various regions of the country, possessing a variety of natural and cultural resources. Also included are examples of subthemes and an in-depth study of a park's theme-development process. Note: Although this information is the most current available to our office at the time of publication, the parks cited might now be using updated statements.

Many of the pages in this guide are topped by a black banner; all such pages are designed to be used as handouts, printed directly from this guide — we use them in theme-development and comprehensive interpretive planning workshops. Please feel free to use any parts of this publication that will be useful for your particular situation. We ask that you credit the National Park Service when reproducing this work. •

the **places**

All cultures embrace the idea that there exist places of special importance. These places rejuvenate our spirits, challenge and strengthen our beliefs, and provoke contemplation and discussion of our past, present, and future. They embody our shared heritage. They define our character as a people.

the **mission**

People yearn to forge their own intellectual and emotional connections to the ideas and meanings inherent in these special places. Interpretation is the profession whose mission is to provide opportunities for people to forge deeper and more meaningful connections.

the **stories**

Although each place holds many meanings, each place also possesses a core set of overarching stories. These stories prompt individuals, groups, and societies to explore each place in more depth, time and time again. The interpretive program uses interpretive themes to tell the stories of these special places.

the **operation**

Thematic interpretation — interpretive services based on the exploration of a place's core stories — is the fundamental framework of the profession. A strategic, comprehensive interpretive planning process uses this framework to drive the development, management, and implementation of all interpretive services.

the **interpreters**

It is critical to the accomplishment of the interpretive mission that professional interpreters develop and conduct interpretive services. Such professionalism is developed through a program of instruction that embodies interpretation's best practices and requires demonstration of fundamental interpretive skills.

People need parks

Our nation is founded on the principle that people are happiest and society works best when individuals are guaranteed the greatest freedom in their quest for personal enrichment consistent with the preservation of our shared natural and cultural heritage. The defining American challenge is to balance that independent drive to succeed with the equitable and sustainable use of resources necessary to assure the same benefits to others, including our descendents.

The National Park System is a microcosm of this essential American philosophy. The founding legislation of the National Park Service directs it to provide for public use and enjoyment of park resources in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

Thus, the challenges of managing park resources are a direct reflection of the challenges facing the nation and, indeed, the world.

The natural and cultural resources of the national parks are, by definition, among the most significant in the nation. Their greatest value is calculated not in dollars, but in importance; they are among the best places to explore our national and personal identity and character. Parks serve to rejuvenate our spirits, challenge and strengthen our beliefs, and provoke contemplation and discussion of our past, present, and future. They move us to become better stewards of each other and the world around us. National parks, along with museums, nature centers, state parks and historic sites, zoos and botanical gardens, universities and schools, and other places that interpret natural and cultural heritage, provide opportunities to explore self, society, and the world in which we live.

Interpretation's mission

From time immemorial, societies have relied on the power of *story* to explore, clarify, and share the ideas, meanings, and values that collectively constitute culture. People use the allegorical and metaphorical properties of story to capture the essence of who we were, who we are, and who we wish to be. People visit parks because, consciously or unconsciously, they seek a personal connection to the powerful stories found in these special places. Providing opportunities for people to forge deeper connections to these meaningful places is the mission of interpretation.

Themes explore meanings

In the profession of interpretation, stories flow from interpretive themes. Interpretation uses themes to connect tangible park resources to the larger ideas, meanings, and values of which they are a part. *Thematic interpretation* is the profession's communication framework that provides opportunities for people to increase their understanding and appreciation of the significances inherent in park resources. This fundamental framework ensures that the core stories of a place are accessible to those who seek them.

Interpretation provides opportunities

Interpretive programs provide access to core stories by offering interpretive services to the public. *Effective interpretive services* provide opportunities for people to forge their own intellectual and emotional connections to the ideas and meanings inherent in the resources of parks. These services are specifically planned, designed, and conducted by interpreters to encourage people to discover more about the park and form their own conclusions about the ideas and meanings inherent in its resources.

Interpretive services are most effective when they are planned comprehensively. Comprehensive interpretive planning is conducted by the park's interpretive staff and other stakeholders, who together establish a long-range vision for the program to best achieve the mission of interpretation. The park's staff continues the process by determining the short-range actions necessary to achieve that vision, and by assembling a reference database to assist in managing the program. This process includes all interpretive services: those delivered personally and non-personally (media), regardless of provider. It considers diverse audiences and multiple points of view, and addresses all those who experience park interpretation — in park and off site. These elements are integrated by design and mutually support achieving desired outcomes. The process produces a *Comprehensive Interpretive Plan* — the strategic underpinning of the park's interpretive program. All interpretive and educational activities performed by the program are based on it and coordinated by it. It forms the overall vision and basis for decision-making relating to the park's interpretive function.

Standards of the profession

The Interpretive Development Program (IDP) of the National Park Service describes standards and best practices for its interpreters and others who provide interpretive services in the National Park System. This program's content is widely applicable to all places that interpret natural and cultural heritage. It provides a path for the development and demonstration of the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to accomplish the interpretive job. This competence-based program produces highly skilled individuals that effectively plan and deliver interpretive services to the public. It focuses interpreters on the mission of interpretation (*increasing understanding and appreciation*); it develops sound interpretive methodology (*interpretive services that provide opportunities for people to forge their own intellectual and emotional connections to the ideas and meanings inherent in park resources*); and it provides a framework for accomplishing the mission (*thematic interpretation that is planned comprehensively and implemented professionally*).

For more information, visit the National Park Service's Interpretive Development Program Internet site at <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/>. There you will find a complete description of the IDP, its philosophy and structure, modules and component plans, submission procedures, and more.

More meaningful park experiences

Effective interpretation leads to park experiences that are more meaningful for visitors. The best interpretation effectively combines the philosophy of Freeman Tilden's masterful work, *Interpreting Our Heritage*; an outcome-driven focus (mandated for federal agencies through the Government Performance and Results Act); the competency-based rigor of the standards and best practices in the Interpretive Development Program; and the structured, yet flexible framework of thematic interpretation and comprehensive interpretive planning. This new synthesis greatly enhances the ability of interpretation to make park experiences more meaningful to people — fostering stewardship of our shared human heritage within and beyond park boundaries. •

Significances of place: Source of all interpretive themes

Significant places

So, what's significant about a particular place? Why is it special? Why is it important? Compared to what? Who's to say? In America, we all have a say. We have a say as individuals when we talk to a neighbor or take our families to visit a place of special importance to us. We have a say when we participate in interest group activities and, indirectly, we have a say when such groups represent our interests, whether we participate or not. We have a say as a national culture through our representatives in government. As a nation, as states, as localities — we attach special importance or significance to certain places because of their distinctiveness, their contrast to other places.

This idea extends beyond America, of course. Nations have also gathered together from time to time to signify that particular places — some of which are in America — are of such importance to the global community that they are worthy of special worldwide recognition and attention. This idea of *place*, and the attachment of meaning to place, is a fundamental human trait. We ascribe significance to special places because of what existed there, what occurred there, what exists there today, or what may exist there in the future.

The whole of park management has always been about place and the many meanings attached to place, meanings ascribed to a place by people. Management serves to retain or restore the characteristics of place so that present and future generations will have the same opportunities to experience it as we have, and as those who preceded us have had. Interpretation is a function of management. Everything interpretation has done, does today, and will do tomorrow revolves around the core denominator of *place*. This is where the interpretive job begins.

Natural and cultural resources — an artificial distinction

The discussion of place would be incomplete if it did not include the terms *natural resources* and *cultural resources*. As people study the world around us, and develop new methods and disciplines, it has often been useful to continually divide the world more and more narrowly to study its pieces in greater depth. So it is with the management of especially significant places.

In the quest for increased knowledge, it has been habitual to identify *natural resources* as resources primarily significant due to their lack of disturbance by people, while defining *cultural resources* as those resources that are primarily significant due to their associations with human action and manipulation. It is important to remember, however, that no cultural resource is divorced from the natural world — and no natural resource is free of associated ideas, meanings, beliefs, and values assigned to it by people.

To a great extent, this division of resources into natural and cultural has been useful for the purposes of academic study, but can be harmful to a holistic exploration of what resources in parks mean, to whom, why, and how these meanings are changing or not changing. Interpreters need to reintegrate resource knowledge to best facilitate the exploration of those resources and the meanings they hold. To comprehend only the pieces without the context of the greater whole is to limit opportunities for people to forge deeper and more meaningful connections to shared heritage.

Interpretive themes explore multiple meanings inherent in the significances of park resources

The significances of a place are embedded in its tangible and intangible characteristics. It is these elements that people find attractive, interesting, and engaging enough to want to experience. These significances caused the place to be set aside and managed for the enjoyment of all. These significances are what people want to explore, understand better, and appreciate more.

Since the desired outcome of interpretation is to provide opportunities for people to explore the meanings of a place — to enhance their own understanding and appreciation of the significances inherent in the park’s natural and cultural resources — the development of interpretive themes must flow from those significances. The significances ascribed to a park are described in a set of *significance statements*. National Park Service documents containing the set of significance statements include general management plans, strategic plans, Comprehensive Interpretive Plans, and many other planning documents. The amount of detail, and the format of the information, may vary from document to document.

Please see the following page for a workshop handout describing park resource significances.

Developing the set of significance statements

How are significance statements defined?

Significances of place are expressed in a *set of statements*. Significance statements clearly describe the distinctiveness of the combined resources of the place (natural, cultural, scientific, recreational, inspirational, etc.). They embody the power of the place through a factual representation of what makes the place special. They are facts placed in relevant context that makes the facts meaningful, summarizing the essence of the importance of the park's resources to our natural and cultural heritage. Significances may evolve over time as a result of discoveries or other updates to knowledge about the place.

How are they used?

In *park planning*, the set of significance statements focuses park management actions on the preservation and enjoyment of those attributes that most directly contribute to the importance of the place.

In *interpretive planning*, statements of significance comprise the core values — the central importance — upon which the park's primary interpretive themes and consequent interpretive program are built. They are the bedrock of thematic interpretation.

How are significances expressed?

Significance statements are usually written as single sentences, and often use such descriptions as largest collection, most diverse representation, most authentic, oldest, best remaining example, etc. These broad statements of facts-in-context are sometimes supported by a hierarchy of more specific statements that detail what makes park resources special, valuable, and meaningful.

What is a useful set of statements?

The following questions should be asked about draft statements of significance to ensure their quality and usefulness:

- Do the statements *clearly describe* the importance of resources (using enough detail, but not too much detail)? Are they understandable?
- Do the statements go beyond just a *listing* of significant resources and *include context* that makes the facts meaningful?
- Do data and consensus substantiate the statements?

- Do the statements reflect current scholarly inquiry and interpretation, including changes that might have occurred since the park's establishment?
- Do the statements describe why the park is important within a local, state, regional, national, or global context?

Examples. *The following statements are excerpts from the complete sets of significance statements for each park cited. They, therefore, only address a portion of each place's significance.*

The attack at Washita was the first implementation of a strategic policy adopted by the U.S. Army to strike encampments of Plains Indians in winter when they were most vulnerable.

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

There are seven species of sea turtles in the world, all of which are threatened and three of which are listed as critically endangered in the IUCN Red Book. Padre Island National Seashore is the only area on the Texas coast where nests from all five species of sea turtles that occur in the Gulf of Mexico have been documented. More Kemps Ridley sea turtle nests have been found at the National Seashore than anywhere else in the United States. The Gulf of Mexico, Laguna Madre, and the Mansfield Channel provide important habitat for these five species of sea turtles.

Padre Island National Seashore

The monument has outstanding research potential because the petroglyphs are numerous, have retained their integrity, are an outstanding example of Rio Grande style, and are close to other associated archaeological resources.

Petroglyph National Monument

The unusually high degree of approachability to the park's active volcanism affords opportunities for fundamental and detailed research not duplicated (or even approached) in any other park in the world, offering relatively safe experiences with lava flows, fountains, and other products of active volcanism.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

Old Dorchester, located at the furthest inland navigable point on the Ashley River, served as a strategic commerce center in colonial South Carolina.

Old Dorchester State Historic Site

Fundamentals of effective thematic interpretation

A group exercise

The fundamentals of thematic interpretation describe how people, things, and ideas are interconnected, and interpretation's role in facilitating an exploration of those connections. Below is a group exercise to prompt an engaging discussion of the fundamentals. Participants in this exercise need not have any previous knowledge of interpretation. The boldface text in quotation marks is intended to simulate language used by the trainer or workshop conductor; the other text indicates actions of, or instructions to, the trainer.

Meanings are explored through tangible, intangible, and universal elements of story

First step:

On a flipchart easel with paper pad, leaving enough space at the top of the sheet for a title to be added later, the trainer writes *see, feel, hear, smell, taste*.

The trainer provides a water bottle or similar tangible object.

The trainer asks the participants to pass the object from person to person, responding to the following question as they pass it.

“Can you name a physical characteristic that you can ascribe to this object: some aspect that you can see, feel, hear, smell, or taste?”

On a flipchart, the trainer records participant responses to this question.

(Responses might include: • Plastic • glass • hard • solid • embossed • ridged • tinted • heavy • light • wet • liquid • sloshing sounds {or other sounds} • bubbles • half full • object is labeled • etc.)

Second step:

The trainer recovers the tangible object.

On a second flipchart, leaving enough space at the top of the sheet for a title to be added later, the trainer writes *ideas, meanings, beliefs, values*.

Once again, the trainer asks the participants to pass the object from person to person, participants responding to the following question as they do so.

“Can you name an idea, meaning, belief, or value that this object can represent?”

On the second flipchart, the trainer records participant responses to this question.

(Responses might include: • Manufacturing • advertising • merchandising • portability • sustainability • life-giving • life-sustaining • rare • precious • purity • necessity • responsibility • conservation • water rights • etc.)

Third step:

On the first flipchart, the trainer writes the title *Tangibles*.

On the second flipchart, the trainer writes the title *Intangibles*.

The essence of interpretation

“What do interpreters do?”

The trainer allows time for participant reflection and response.

“Interpreters tell stories. Humans communicate through story. You communicate through story.”

(Examples: • You told stories this morning when introducing yourselves. You told stories during lunch. • How do we teach children about the world? Through story. • Remember returning to school, “What did you do on summer vacation?” Stories. • Monday morning at work, “How was your weekend?” Stories. • Talk with spouse when you get home, “How was your day?” Stories. • How do you celebrate holidays — with family? Stories. • How many of you watch television? You watch stories. • Read newspapers? Listen to the radio? Songs? Go to movies or watch videos? Stories.)

Stories and culture

“Stories are the way we survive. How do stories help us survive?”

The trainer allows time for participant reflection and response.

(Responses might include: • To learn • teach • entertain • persuade • metaphor for greater truth {Aesop’s fables} • tradition • perpetuate system of meanings and values {society, civilization} • re-live the event • children ask for same stories over and over • some visitors want same information each visit and will tell the interpreter that any new information is wrong because it’s different.)

“We use stories to connect to, explore, clarify, and share the meanings, ideas, and values that collectively constitute our culture and our world.”

How stories work

The trainer displays a clean sheet on each of the flipcharts.

On the first flipchart (used for tangibles), the trainer lists several tangible components of a story like Cinderella — *stepmother, pumpkin, mice, glass slipper*, etc.

“What story do these tangible elements suggest to you?”

The trainer allows time for participant reflection and response.

The trainer then discusses how the tangible elements alone do *not* make a story. Intangible elements are a necessary, critical ingredient in storytelling and, in fact, are the real reasons for telling stories in the first place. Humans use stories to explore ideas, meanings, beliefs, and values.

“What is the meaning of the Cinderella story?”

(Responses might include: • Never give up hope • Goodness will win out in the end • Good things come to those who wait • Friends are key to overcoming adversity • The importance of timeliness • Believe in possibilities • etc.)

On the second flipchart (used for intangibles), the trainer records participant responses. The trainer should encourage participants so that at least three or four responses are forthcoming.

“Which of these is the right answer?”

The trainer allows time for participant reflection and response.

The trainer discusses the idea that “all answers are right” if they have meaning for the participant. The trainer goes on to explore the notions of personal sovereignty and multiple points of view.

Please see the following page for a workshop handout describing the tenets of interpretation, including the sovereignty of visitors and multiple points of view.

“An effective story connects tangible elements to the ideas, meanings, beliefs, and values that define human experience — a story’s intangible elements. This is especially true of the intangibles that can be categorized as *universal concepts*.”

On the second flipchart, the trainer writes *universal concepts*.

Discuss the idea of universal concepts: intangibles that, in one form or another, are common to all people. The concepts are universal — family, adversity, responsibility, love — although the values individuals associate with them may vary widely.

Tenets of interpretation

Visitors' rights

Visitors: People who experience the park's interpretive program, whether visiting the park in person, or experiencing it through remote means (Internet, brochure, article, film, curriculum, etc.)

The park's interpretive program and staff promote, protect, and respect the rights of all visitors. This is critical to the achievement of the interpretive mission: to provide opportunities for people to explore the meanings inherent in the resources of the park, strengthening their own intellectual and emotional connections to them. All visitors have the right:

To have their privacy and independence respected.

To retain and express their own values.

To be treated with courtesy and consideration.

To receive accurate and balanced information.

Universal design

The park's interpretive services are designed to be as universally accessible as possible to best meet the varied physical and cognitive needs of interpretive audiences.

Hierarchy of sophistication

The park's interpretive program treats subject matter in a range of ways — from simple-and-basic to complex-and-advanced — to best meet the varied interests of interpretive audiences.

Range of interpretive services

The park's interpretive program includes a range of personal and non-personal interpretive services to best meet the varied learning styles of interpretive audiences, offering a variety of interpretive experiences.

Multiple points of view

The park's interpretive program treats subject matter from a variety of perspectives to aid in accuracy and relevance to varied interpretive audiences.

“The parts of stories that have the greatest value are intangibles, especially universal intangibles, because they connect with the widest range of people.”

“Interpreters use interpretive themes to craft stories that connect the tangible resources of parks to the intangible ideas, meanings, beliefs, and values that make those parks significant.”

“That’s why it’s called *thematic interpretation*.”

For more information about the fundamentals of interpretation, visit the Internet site <<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/>> where a complete description of the NPS Interpretive Development Program, its philosophy and structure, modules and component lesson plans, submission procedures, etc., can be found. Module 101 of the IDP, “Fulfilling the NPS Mission: The Process of Interpretation,” focuses specifically on the fundamentals of interpretation. •

Applying interpretive fundamentals: Developing interpretive themes

Interpretive themes enable people to explore the meanings of park resources through story

Now that some of the interpretive groundwork has been laid, the application of that groundwork can begin. The set of significance statements represents what is important, special, and distinctive about the park's resources — in a factual format. These significances need to be translated into story language to enhance the opportunities of visitors to explore the meanings of the place. These stories are interpretive themes, upon which the park's interpretive program is built.

Organization and characteristics of interpretive themes

Interpretive themes operate at two levels: as primary interpretive themes and subthemes. Primary interpretive themes are the overarching, biggest stories about the place, based on its described significances. Subthemes are the smaller stories that nest within the primary interpretive themes. They tend to be narrower in scope than primary themes. Subthemes are the specific themes used to develop interpretive programs and services. Their narrower scope encourages the exploration of specific ideas in greater depth.

Characteristics that are common to both levels of interpretive themes include the following:

- All interpretive themes are based on the significances of park resources.
- All interpretive themes are the cores of stories used to explore the multiple significances of the park's resources to the public.
- All interpretive themes connect park resources to the larger ideas, meanings, beliefs, and values of which they are a part.
- All interpretive themes are best stated as single sentences that include tangible and intangible elements. Sentence structure forces theme writers to focus their ideas. (An interpretive theme is never stated as a topic. While topics can be useful in organizing a body of work, topics alone do not provide interpretive focus. Since topics are written in one or several words — such as geology, Southwest history, wildlife, architecture, etc. — their meanings are too ambiguous to be useful. Sentence structure ensures more complete and

coherent development of related ideas. Sentences enable an interpretive theme to connect tangible resources with meanings, ideas, and values in ways that increase the relevance of these significances to visitors. That, in turn, helps interpretation facilitate an increase in visitors' understanding and appreciation of the park's resources.)

- All interpretive themes contain universal concepts, allowing a wide and diverse range of people to all find personal paths of connection to the stories of the place.
- All interpretive themes provide opportunities for people to explore the meanings of the place, without telling people what park resources should mean to them.

Developing primary interpretive themes from significances

Since the desired outcome of interpretation is to provide opportunities for people to explore the significances of a place — to enhance their own understanding and appreciation of the significances inherent in the park's natural and cultural resources — the development of interpretive themes must flow from those significances. Primary interpretive themes are the primary stories that allow people to explore the most important significances of the park's resources. They are translations of factual significance statements into overarching park stories. They are written as a set of *primary interpretive themes*. All primary interpretive themes within the park's set are of equal priority and importance — they are all larger in scope than any of the subthemes which flow from them. Each park in the National Park System has a Comprehensive Interpretive Plan that contains the park's set of primary interpretive theme statements. Other documents, such as general management plans and strategic plans, may also reproduce this set of statements.

The process of developing the park's set of primary interpretive themes involves park interpreters, staff from other park divisions, and others who have a stake in the interpretive program. A workshop setting enables the vast experience and subject-matter knowledge of this stakeholder group to work together in real time to decide what core stories best translate the park's set of significance statements into themes. The process usually begins by participants discussing the major concepts they see embodied in and exemplified by the park's resources. These ideas often take the initial form of short phrases, and build on each other.

Once these initial ideas are voiced and recorded on a flipchart, the group then works toward crafting more complete statements. After the phrases have been restated in this more complete form, they are compared to each other with more scrutiny as participants look for the phraseology that best expresses what they are trying to say, and which ideas, meanings, values, and beliefs seem to best fit together as related groups of thought. This refinement process continues until the park's set of primary interpretive themes are well crafted: themes that are useful not only in the task of strategically developing the interpretive program, but also useful in developing subthemes and the interpretive services that will flow from them.

Please see the following page for a workshop handout describing primary interpretive themes.

Developing the set of primary interpretive themes

How are primary themes defined?

Primary interpretive themes are the primary stories that present the most important significances of the park's resources to the public. They are translations of factual significance statements into overarching park stories. All primary interpretive themes are of equal priority and importance.

How are they used?

In *interpretive planning*, the set of primary interpretive themes forms the foundation of the park's interpretive program, built upon the bedrock of the significances inherent in park resources.

How are primary themes expressed?

Primary interpretive themes are best written as single sentences. Although primary themes are based on park significance statements, there need not be a one-to-one relationship between statements of significance and primary interpretive themes. However, the *set* of primary theme statements must represent the entire *set* of resource significances.

What are useful primary interpretive themes?

The following questions should be asked about a draft set of primary interpretive themes to ensure the quality and usefulness of the themes:

- Are the primary interpretive themes grounded in the park's statements of significance?
- Does the set of primary themes convey the *complete set* of significances?
- Do the themes go beyond just a *restatement* of the facts; do they include tangibles, intangibles, and universal concepts?
- Are these primary themes critical to accomplishing the desired interpretive outcome of increasing visitor understanding and appreciation of the significances of the park's resources?
- Are the themes complete, understandable sentences?

Examples. *The following statements are excerpts from the complete sets of primary interpretive themes for each park cited. They, therefore, only address a portion of each place's significance.*

The attack at Washita was controversial at the time it occurred and remains controversial today: the United States military and many civilians hailed it as a victory in the struggle to reduce Indian raids on frontier settlements; Indians and many whites labeled the attack a massacre — unprovoked and unjust.

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

The unique combination of environments and conditions at Padre Island National Seashore (the largest section of undeveloped barrier island in the world; its location and associated ocean dynamics; rare coastal prairie; a complex, dynamic dune system; a hypersaline lagoon; high biotic diversity and integrity; etc.) provides rare opportunities to understand the complex and critical processes and interactions that sustain the living world.

Padre Island National Seashore

The symbols connected to this place — petroglyphs, land grant deeds, Christian crosses, livestock brands, and inscriptions — provide opportunities to explore the ownership, control, and use of land, resources, identity, and ideas in the ongoing history of the American Southwest.

Petroglyph National Monument

The approachable, active volcanoes of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park allow first-hand discovery and connection with one of the most fundamental forces of our world — in both its creative and destructive roles.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

The social, political, economic, and religious forces that framed the founding and evolution of colonial Dorchester provide opportunities for us to explore how communities survive and prosper through human interdependence.

Old Dorchester State Historic Site, South Carolina

Established during the Progressive Era in American history, Colorado National Monument is emblematic of our nation's first conservation movement, during which concerned citizens like John Otto worked with vision and perseverance to have recognized and preserved for future generations those special lands and values that comprise our American heritage.

Colorado National Monument

Complete sets of park significances and primary interpretive themes

The following pages contain actual sets of significance statements and primary interpretive themes from large and small parks, in various regions of the country, possessing a variety of natural and cultural resources. Although the significances and primary interpretive themes are the most current available to our office at the time of publication, the parks cited might now be using updated statements.

These complete sets of park significances and primary interpretive themes can be used as workshop handouts. •

Fort Davis National Historic Site

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Fort Davis is one of the best remaining examples in the Southwest of a typical post-Civil War frontier fort because of the extent of the surviving structures and ruins.

Fort Davis provides an excellent opportunity for understanding and appreciating the important role played by African Americans in the West and specifically in the frontier army because black troops served at the post from 1867 to 1885.

Fort Davis provided essential troops and supplies to the Victorio Campaign, which ended meaningful resistance of Apache bands in the Trans-Pecos.

The historic integrity and character of the military post has not been significantly altered since its establishment. Much of the landscape immediately adjacent to the post has undergone little change.

Fort Davis was strategically located to defend the Trans-Pecos portion of the San Antonio-El Paso Road and the Chihuahua Trail. This encompassed controlling activities on the southern stem of the Great Comanche War Trail and Mescalero Apache war trails.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The history of Fort Davis, encompassing the conflict between native peoples (Apaches, Comanches, and Kiowas) and the ever-increasing flow of emigrants and settlers to the Trans-Pecos region, provides opportunities to explore the ideas of security, sovereignty, and cultural identity in the American West.

The historical integrity of Fort Davis (including quality and quantity of original fabric, historic records and artifacts, and the cultural/natural landscape) enables a deeper understanding of the realities of frontier military life in the American West.

The history of African-American soldiers at Fort Davis is an important chapter in the larger American social movement toward equality for all citizens, a movement that continues today.

Padre Island National Seashore

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Padre Island National Seashore is the largest section of undeveloped barrier island in the world, protecting rare coastal prairie; a complex, dynamic dune system; and the Laguna Madre, a hypersaline lagoon environment.

The location of the island, ocean dynamics, biotic diversity and integrity, lack of development, and easy access make Padre Island an ideal place to study natural communities and species associated with barrier islands.

Padre Island National Seashore provides important habitat for marine and terrestrial plants and animals, including a number of rare, threatened, and endangered species.

There are seven species of sea turtles in the world, all of which are threatened and three of which are listed as critically endangered in the IUCN Red Book. Padre Island National Seashore is the only area on the Texas coast where nests from all five species of sea turtles that occur in the Gulf of Mexico have been documented. More Kemp's Ridley sea turtle nests have been found at the National Seashore than anywhere else in the United States. The Gulf of Mexico, Laguna Madre, and the Mansfield Channel provide important habitat for these five species of sea turtles.

Situated along the Central Flyway, Padre Island is a globally important area for over 350 migratory, overwintering, and resident bird species.

With the longest stretch of undeveloped barrier island beach in the world, Padre Island National Seashore provides rare opportunities for beach recreation in an environment of isolation and solitude.

Padre Island National Seashore offers outstanding recreational fishing opportunities in the Laguna Madre and Gulf of Mexico.

Bird Island Basin in the Laguna Madre is internationally recognized as one of the premier windsurfing areas in the world.

The integrity of Padre Island National Seashore as a cultural landscape documents a continuum of human habitation from more than 2,500 years ago to today in a continually changing barrier island landscape that itself is only about 5,000 years old. Some of the richest and best-documented archival resources regarding Spanish exploration of North America document the history of the area that is now Padre Island National Seashore. Padre Island National Seashore includes important archeological resources relating to the era of early Spanish exploration — including three shipwrecks dating to 1554. The Novillo line camp and associated historic resources of Padre Island National Seashore include the last remaining structures relating to barrier island open-range cattle ranching in the United States.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The unique combination of environments and conditions at Padre Island National Seashore (the largest section of undeveloped barrier island in the world; its location and associated ocean dynamics; rare coastal prairie; a complex, dynamic dune system; a hypersaline lagoon; high biotic diversity and integrity; etc.) provides rare opportunities to understand the complex and critical processes and interactions that sustain the living world.

The human history of Padre Island offers insights into the continuing evolution of human interaction with the rich, dynamic, and challenging resources of complex and fragile barrier island environments, providing opportunities to understand and appreciate the range of consequences, both personal and societal, of making choices in today's world.

The diversity and high quality of environments at Padre Island National Seashore offer a wide range of enjoyable activities including: carefree recreation in inspiring, undeveloped coastal settings; challenging opportunities for learning and study regarding rich and diverse cultural and natural resources; and active participation in preserving habitats and saving endangered species.

Olympic National Park

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

The Olympic Peninsula is an island-like ecosystem displaying all the ramifications of its isolation.

Olympic National Park is an important refugium for a great variety of plants and animals living within a dramatic climate gradient; many are unique to Olympic National Park.

Olympic National Park is one of the largest intact temperate forest ecosystems and one of the finest examples of temperate rain forest ecosystems in North America.

Olympic National Park has a large number of special-status species.

The extreme gradient of elevation, temperature, and precipitation from Olympic National Park's coastline to its mountain peaks has created a tremendous diversity of habitats and lifeforms that help us understand the diversity of the planet in a dramatically visible way.

Olympic National Park is an important place for process diversity — where complex systems can continue to function and interact.

Integrity of natural and cultural resources makes this place a great potential baseline for long term studies regarding dynamic natural processes.

Olympic National Park includes a great number of low-elevation glaciers and their associated terrains, accessible to a large metropolitan population.

Olympic National Park's resources are so outstanding that it has been internationally recognized as a world Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve, attesting to its importance to all humankind as a benchmark for monitoring environmental change.

Olympic National Park is one of the largest unimpaired wildernesses in the National Park System in the contiguous United States: 95% of the park (825,000 acres) is wilderness. This relatively accessible, unimpaired, federally-designated wilderness (including mountains, forest, and seacoast) provides opportunities for people to connect with nature, and find solitude, inspiration, and renewal.

The park includes one of the longest strips of coastal wilderness in the 48 states.

The integrity of park resources provides outstanding opportunities for long-term research.

The quality, diversity, and magnitude of Olympic National Park's resources powerfully affect the human spirit, inspiring awe, wonder, majesty, and reverence.

Olympic National Park's diverse and complex ecosystems provides an internationally recognized living laboratory for scientists, educators, and visitors to learn, study, experiment, and discover.

Olympic National Park protects one of the largest intact sets of river systems in the 48 states. This is important for the perpetuation of anadromous fish and many other freshwater and terrestrial resources.

Olympic National Park has high-quality airshed and watershed — it has some of the cleanest air in the world. The park is a Class I airshed.

Olympic National Park supports the largest protected Roosevelt Elk population in the world.

The old growth temperate rain forest of Olympic National Park is an excellent examples of this endangered ecosystem.

Rescued from complete elimination from the American landscape Olympic National Park protects the last examples of old growth forest on such a scale as to provide visitors with a glimpse of the past into a forest world of remarkable dimensions, inhabited by a great variety of rare and unique creatures.

Olympic National Park preserves the core of a larger ecosystem and, as such, protects and sustains resources, cycles, and processes that enrich life far beyond park boundaries; yet the park is not an island whose values can be perpetuated without the stewardship of us all.

Olympic National Park is one of the last, best homes of the great migrating populations of anadromous fish that fueled an unprecedented array of human cultures over millennia. These populations of keystone species continue to nourish the health of human cultures, and aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Thousand of years of geographic isolation, along with extreme gradients of elevation and precipitation, have fostered an assemblage of plants and animals unique in the world, providing outstanding opportunities for research, discovery, and inspiration.

The park includes the traditional lands of eight American Indian tribes that have experienced little treaty dislocation and retain their ongoing connection between community and land.

Olympic National Park

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS (continued)

The Olympic Peninsula was one of the last areas explored by Euro-Americans in the 48 states. This connects to the history of discovery, exploration, and homesteading in the Pacific Northwest.

Visible to much of the rapidly growing metropolitan population around Puget Sound, Olympic National Park is a daily reminder of the relevance of the national park idea in our increasingly crowded society.

Olympic National Park documents the continuing evolution of the preservation ethic in the United States, exemplified by current management issues in the national park such as habitat restoration, dam removal, goat removal, wolf reintroduction.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The unique assemblage of plants, animals, and habitats in Olympic National Park exists as a result of geographic isolation of the peninsula through the millenia, and is internationally recognized as valuable to all peoples.

The integrity, diversity, and magnitude of Olympic National Park's relatively unimpaired wilderness ecosystems powerfully affect the human spirit — providing outstanding opportunities for exploration, research, introspection, and inspiration.

The Olympic Peninsula's rich cultural history reveals a dynamic interaction of people, place, and values — illustrating the ongoing struggle to balance diverse resource uses and their consequences.

Old Dorchester State Historic Site

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

The village of Dorchester is a remnant of the global process of European colonization and exemplifies, in microcosm, many elements of colonial and revolutionary era life in South Carolina.

Extensive historical records exist for Old Dorchester, adding tremendous integrity to the site.

The village site has maintained a high degree of archeological integrity, and in the process provides us with extensive documentation of life during the period 1690 to 1780. It is one of the most intact and protected colonial town complexes in South Carolina.

Old Dorchester State Historic Site is one of the few ongoing archeological projects open to the public in South Carolina. Here visitors can observe daily investigations, a source of ongoing discoveries.

The fort and village are significant for their association with the American Revolutionary War. The fort is one of only a handful of surviving fortifications remaining in South Carolina that were occupied by both British and American troops.

The fort at Old Dorchester is a tangible reminder of the anxiety and insecurity that the French and Indian War created among colonial South Carolinians.

The fort at Old Dorchester is the largest, best preserved, and most complete tabby fortification in North America.

Old Dorchester documents an important relationship between Anglicans and Congregationalists in colonial South Carolina.

Old Dorchester signifies an important link in the migration of Congregationalists from England to Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Georgia.

In the time period that Old Dorchester's church bell tower was built, few existed in South Carolina; this bell tower signifies the relative affluence of the Old Dorchester populace.

The oldest continuing schoolboard in America has its roots in Old Dorchester.

Old Dorchester, located at the furthest inland navigable point on the Ashley River, served as a strategic commerce center in colonial South Carolina.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The social, political, economic, and religious forces that framed the founding and evolution of colonial Dorchester provide opportunities for us to explore how communities survive and prosper through human interdependence.

The ongoing investigation of colonial Dorchester's cultural resources provides interactive opportunities to understand how archeological and historical investigation help us to learn from our past.

The Anglican bell tower standing in a community that was founded by Congregationalists is emblematic of the dynamic relationship among the various religious groups of colonial Dorchester.

The fort at colonial Dorchester, built as a response to the French and Indian War and adapted for use in the Revolutionary War, exemplifies the need of communities to ensure the safety of their members.

Petroglyph National Monument

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Petroglyph National Monument contains one of the largest concentrations of petroglyphs in North America and represents an extensive record of peoples for whom we have few written records.

The monument has outstanding research potential because the petroglyphs are numerous, have retained their integrity, are an outstanding example of Rio Grande style, and are close to other associated archaeological resources.

Places in the monument have traditional and cultural importance to Southwestern American Indians and Atrisco Land Grant heirs.

The largely unexcavated Piedras Marcadas Pueblo ruin is one of the largest pueblos of its time period in the Rio Grande valley.

The monument's natural and cultural landscape (escarpment, volcanic cones, and surrounding open space) and long vistas are major elements that define Albuquerque's western horizon and provide opportunities to experience contrasts with a growing urban environment.

The geologic resources of Petroglyph National Monument (tectonic rifts, cinder cones and lava flows, and dramatic erosional features) facilitates both an understanding of the formation of the Rio Grande Rift and how natural landmarks have been recognized by and influenced a number of cultures.

Because of the historical significance of the land base in the proximity of a major urban area, Petroglyph National Monument provides a unique opportunity to interpret the divergent and convergent historical events and cultural viewpoints of the Puebloans and Europeans (Spanish) that led to conflict and resolution.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The rich concentration of petroglyphs and the associated cultural landscape at Petroglyph National Monument, recognized as important by the native peoples of the mid Rio Grande Valley and others, offer opportunities to contemplate the meaning of cultural continuity in our world of accelerating change.

This geologically active area, formed by rifting, volcanism, and erosional forces including the Rio Grande and its tributaries, has attracted people for thousands of years and powerfully influenced their lifeways, traditions, and beliefs — exemplifying how landscapes shape and influence human societies.

The symbols connected to this place — petroglyphs, land grant deeds, Christian crosses, livestock brands, and inscriptions — provide opportunities to explore the ownership, control, and use of land, resources, identity, and ideas in the ongoing history of the American Southwest.

The continuity of the Atrisco Land Grant from 1692 to the present provides an opportunity to understand 300 years of land grant ownership in the face of an ever-changing urban landscape and continued use by the heirs of the original Spanish settlers.

Colorado National Monument

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Erosion in the monument has exposed a billion and a half years of Earth history. Here, a dramatic sequence of folded and fractured rock formations has been sculpted to form a spectacular array of canyons, plateaus, arches and towering spires.

The monument's 1.7-billion-year-old Precambrian basement rock and the 1.5-billion-year Precambrian-to-Triassic gap in the geologic record at Colorado National Monument illustrate important episodes in the continuing cycle of dynamic earth processes with continent-wide ramifications.

Once a range of the ancestral Rockies, the ancient highlands that existed here as a result of several uplifts were the source of sediments deposited over much of the Colorado Plateau, creating the spectacular landforms seen in other parks (Arches, Canyon de Chelly, Canyonlands, Grand Canyon, etc.).

Colorado National Monument is a clear and powerful example of ongoing dynamic geologic cycles such as uplift, erosion, and deposition that serve as and provide a "living laboratory" for scientific study, education, and interpretation.

Colorado National Monument provides an introduction to many of the physical and biological features of the Colorado Plateau.

Spectacular landforms and the interplay of light, shadow, and color create glorious vistas from vantage points in the Grand Valley and the national monument.

In close proximity to the urban and rural settings of the Grand Valley, Colorado National Monument provides an opportunity for quiet solitude, recreation, and enjoyment that can evoke strong emotional responses.

The monument's landforms acted as a significant barrier to human use and travel between Glade Park and the Grand Valley; the cultural resources of the monument document how people overcame these barriers.

Visionary, trail builder, champion of the idea that these red rock canyons should be a national park, the life of the monument's first custodian, John Otto, showed how one person can make significant contributions to society.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Colorado National Monument's dramatic landforms and spectacular vistas are but the latest manifestation of our Earth's continuous recycling process of mountain building, erosion, and deposition within a greater geologic story of continent building and the evolution of unique regional landforms.

The evidence of human use within the imposing and dramatic landscapes of Colorado National Monument is a powerful reminder of how geologic features and forces have challenged, and continue to challenge, the human drive to occupy, survive, and thrive in seemingly inhospitable landscapes.

The spectacular landforms and sublime natural beauty of Colorado National Monument provide opportunities for solitude, exploration, inspiration, and renewal that can fulfill the human need for self-discovery through connection to the land.

Established during the Progressive Era in American history, Colorado National Monument is emblematic of our nation's first conservation movement, during which concerned citizens like John Otto worked with vision and perseverance to have recognized and preserved for future generations those special lands and values that comprise our American heritage.

The protected lands of Colorado National Monument, adjacent to a large and growing urban population, preserve valuable habitat for biotic communities of the Colorado Plateau — and serve as an outdoor laboratory for scientific research and environmental education.

Grand Canyon National Park

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Grand Canyon's immense and richly colored scenic vistas, enhanced by a near-pristine natural setting, inspire a variety of emotional, intellectual, artistic, and spiritual impressions.

Grand Canyon National Park is located in one of the cleanest remaining pockets of air in the United States and is a Class I area.

Legislation passed in 1975 to enlarge Grand Canyon National Park contained the first-ever clause mandating the federal protection of "natural quiet and experience".

The high elevation, dry air, and remote location create exceptional viewing of the night sky.

Over one million acres of undeveloped backcountry, hundreds of miles of trails, and 277 river miles containing world-class white-water provide tremendous opportunities for exploration, personal challenge, discovery, learning, social interaction, or solitude.

The Grand Canyon of the Colorado River is the world's greatest example of arid land erosion and one of the most spectacular exposures of stratified rocks.

Although Grand Canyon reveals rocks ranging from 245-1840 million (*1.8 billion*) years old, the landscape is relatively young, having been sculpted in just the last 5-6 million years.

The vastness of its landscape — an average depth of 4000 feet, width of 10 miles, and a length of 277 river miles — contains a seemingly infinite system of colorfully sculptured plateaus, mesas, buttes, cliffs, slopes, ridgelines, and side canyons.

Grand Canyon is composed of a wide variety of rock types that respond differently to the forces of erosion. These rock layers vary in thickness, composition, and uplift, resulting in six geologically distinct sections.

The Grand Canyon Supergroup is one of the most complete records of Middle and early Late Proterozoic age exposed on the North American continent.

Early studies of Grand Canyon provided evidence for fundamental geologic concepts, specifically the principles of base level erosion, antecedent and superimposed streams, and the power of rivers to cut canyons.

Grand Canyon remains a powerful illustration of geology, widely used by educators to convey an understanding of geologic principles.

Grand Canyon's extensive sedimentary strata and dry caves have preserved a remarkable record of past plant and animal life.

1.2 billion-year-old stromatolites (algal mats) preserved in Precambrian Bass Limestone,

plant imprints, animal tracks, and extinct species of marine life in Paleozoic strata ranging from 245-540 million years ago, and

remains of ice age to post-glacial mammals and birds from the Late Pleistocene to Early Holocene.

Grand Canyon is an "exhibit-in-place" of the effects of geography on plants and animals.

Grand Canyon's extreme and abrupt changes in elevation, exposure, and climate support a diversity of communities ranging from desert (including three of the four North American deserts) to boreal forest in unusual proximity.

Early investigations into the biology of the Grand Canyon led to the development of fundamental ecological principles, including:

- the impact of eliminating predators on prey populations (Kaibab Plateau, 1920s),
- the influence of geographic isolation on the evolution of species as illustrated by the Kaibab squirrel, and
- C. Hart Merriam's delineation of "life zones."

Grand Canyon has played, and continues to play, a pivotal role in precedent-setting conservation issues, including air quality, natural quiet, fire ecology, and adaptive river management.

The Bureau of Reclamation's proposal to build two dams in Grand Canyon in the 1960s sparked one of the most notable conservation battles in U.S. history. A nation-wide protest defeated the projects and influenced the modern environmental movement. This pivotal battle set in motion a historic transition from decades of dam building to the present era of proposed dam removal — a shift in societal values currently being played out across the nation.

Study of the effects of Glen Canyon Dam has resulted in an unprecedented adaptive management approach to mitigate downstream impacts of dam operations. The experimental flood in 1996 marked the first time water was released from a federal dam to benefit the downstream environment.

Grand Canyon National Park

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS (continued)

The challenges of protecting park resources while providing for the enjoyment of millions of annual visitors led to the implementation of mass transit, in the form of shuttle buses, in 1974. Early in the 21st century, Grand Canyon National Park will become the first unit of the national park system to implement a light rail system to preserve park resources and to enhance visitor experience.

A variety of American Indian cultures, past and present, are represented in and around Grand Canyon.

Cultural evidence includes:

Folsom artifacts indicating habitation 10,000 years ago, a large collection of well-preserved split twig figures from hunting-gathering culture of 4,500 years ago, and ample remains of Ancestral Puebloan people including examples of dry-land farming.

Many American Indian tribes have close and sacred cultural ties to Grand Canyon, including the Hualapai, the Havasupai, the Hopi, the Kaibab Band of Paiute, the Navajo Nation, the Pueblo of Zuni, the San Juan Southern Paiute, and the Shivwits Band of Paiute. Some of these tribes consider Grand Canyon to be their place of origin/emergence and homeland.

Despite centuries of conflict with Spanish soldiers, missionaries, miners, settlers, and the U.S. Government, most tribes in and around Grand Canyon have maintained a high degree of cultural integrity.

Grand Canyon's cultural history is a study in exploration, exploitation, development, and preservation of land in the American West.

In 1540, a company of Spanish conquistadors in search of the mythical Seven Cities of Cibola, led by Garcia Lopez de Cardenas (dispatched by Pedro de Tovar) became the first Europeans to set eyes on the Grand Canyon. Their legacy is reflected in place names throughout the canyon. Most significantly, they named the *Colorado* River for its reddish brown color.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, Grand Canyon reflected the history of the West as it was exploited for minerals. Unlike many "boom and bust" western settlements, however, miners found more economic rewards in promoting Grand Canyon tourism.

Prior to the establishment of Grand Canyon National Park in 1919, the Santa Fe Railroad, the Fred Harvey Company, and the U.S. Forest Service played significant roles in the tourist development of the South Rim

Mary E. J. Colter, an employee of the Fred Harvey Company, creatively combined local American Indian architectural styles and materials into her buildings for Grand Canyon National Park, which are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The use of native rock and log structures in Grand Canyon National Park led to a proliferation of rustic architecture in other national parks, which has come to symbolize and romanticize the West of the late 1800s and early 1900s. The site plan and collection of historic buildings in Grand Canyon Village is an example of early community planning.

Yavapai Observation Station is one of the first examples of museums in the national park system.

Emery and Ellsworth Kolb built a home and photographic studio between 1904-1926 on the canyon's rim. The footage the brothers filmed of their adventurous boat trip on the Colorado River from 1911-1912 was the first-ever movie of river running in Grand Canyon. Emery narrated public showings of the film for the next six decades.

Grand Canyon National Park was designated in 1979 as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), recognizing it as a place of universal value to be preserved as a part of the heritage of all peoples. Because of its superlative features, Grand Canyon National Park qualifies under both natural and cultural world heritage site criteria, placing it in elite company; only 4 percent of more than 460 sites worldwide are distinguished by this dual designation..

Grand Canyon National Park

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The immense and colorful Grand Canyon is valued worldwide as one of Earth's most powerful and inspiring scenic landscapes, offering people enriching opportunities to explore and experience wild beauty in both vast and intimate spaces.

Water is the lifeblood of Grand Canyon — a force of erosion, a sustainer of scarce riparian habitat in a desert environment, a spiritual element for native peoples, a provider of recreation, and a central factor in the exploration, development, and politics of the American West.

The Colorado River and other erosional forces sculpted the southern edge of the Colorado Plateau to form the Grand Canyon, revealing a beautiful sequence of rock layers that serve as windows into time.

Extreme changes in elevation, exposure, and climate in the Grand Canyon support a remarkable range of biotic communities in unusual proximity; a relatively undisturbed ecosystem that allows natural processes to continue, providing sanctuary for present and future life.

Grand Canyon remains a homeland and a sacred place to a number of American Indian cultures, a point of emergence to some, offering us an opportunity to consider the powerful and spiritual ties between people and place.

Grand Canyon has sustained people materially and spiritually for thousands of years — wider recognition of its value led to its designation as a national park and world heritage site; however, continuing threats to its preservation generate dialogue about our need and responsibility to conserve our local and global environment.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park features Mauna Loa and Kilauea, two of the most active volcanoes in the world.

Mauna Loa — measured from its base deep beneath the surface of the sea to its peak — contains more material by volume than any other mountain on Earth.

The unusually high degree of approachability to the park's active volcanism affords opportunities for fundamental and detailed research not duplicated (or even approached) in any other park in the world, offering relatively safe experiences with lava flows, fountains, and other products of active volcanism.

The long history and collaborative nature of the research performed by the USGS Hawai'i Volcano Observatory and others at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park have made Mauna Loa and Kilauea among the most studied and best understood volcanoes in the world.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park provides critical living space in a wide variety of ecological zones for the highly endemic native biota, much of which is threatened or endangered, requiring active management of native and non-native species.

The diversity and importance of the cultural resources in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park — and the protection of natural features and processes afforded by national park status — combine to make Hawai'i Volcanoes critically important to the perpetuation of traditional native Hawaiian religion and culture.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park encompasses the largest expanse of Hawaiian natural environment managed as wilderness, with the associated wilderness values of natural sounds, lack of mechanization and development, natural darkness, and opportunities for solitude.

The park's resources are so rare, valuable, and inspirational to all the people of the world that the United Nations has declared the park an International Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park protects the most extensive tract of protected montane tropical rain forest in the National Park Service.

The structural complexity and isolation of the Hawaiian Islands and their active volcanic setting makes them a world-class living laboratory of biogeography and evolution. The protected status of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park lands offers important opportunities for this work to continue.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The approachable, active volcanoes of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park allow first-hand discovery of and connection with one of the most fundamental forces of our world — in both its creative and destructive roles.

The journeys of the Hawaiian people, who continue to inhabit these rich and diverse lands, include cultural clashes, adaptations, and assimilations that provide enduring lessons about human resourcefulness, interdependence, and respect for the life of the land.

In Hawai'i, active volcanism created an isolated home for a few immigrant species that gave rise to a rich yet fragile endemic biota; due to the accelerating change brought about by human actions, much of that unique heritage continues to be lost to extinction, challenging all of us to learn from the past and work together to preserve the remaining native plants and animals.

Kilauea, the home of Pele, is sacred to many Native Hawaiians: it is a place of birth and the well-spring of many spirits and forces; the active volcanism, the features of the terrain, and the plants and animals that live there are all important to Native Hawaiian sense of identity, unity, and continuity.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park provides an opportunity for people to experience the values of Hawai'i's diverse wilderness; the park's designation as a World Heritage Site and International Biosphere Reserve attests to its importance as a benchmark for monitoring environmental change.

El Morro National Monument

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

The sandstone cuesta of El Morro (Inscription Rock) documents 1,000 years of human history in the Southwest:

Over 200 petroglyphs were carved between 1000-1400 AD by Ancestral Pueblo Indians;

Over 2,000 names were inscribed between 1600-1900 AD by Spanish explorers, American surveyors, immigrants journeying west, U.S. Army soldiers, and area settlers.

The natural catchment basin at the base of El Morro served many people as a rare and reliable source of water for over 1,000 years:

It supported two major Ancestral Puebloan pueblos;

It influenced the location of a major trade route and has cultural, religious, and historical significance to the Zuni, Navajo, Acoma, Laguna, and 15 other culturally affiliated tribes;

It enabled European and American explorers, soldiers, and travelers on their way west.

The two major Ancestral Puebloan pueblo sites in the monument are especially valuable because they date between 1200-1300 AD (a period that has had relatively little archeological investigation) and are largely unexcavated.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Water permeates the story of El Morro: the power of water carved this compelling landscape; the reliable availability of water here has attracted settlers and travelers for over 1,000 years; the importance of this place moved many to leave their marks on the cuesta of Inscription Rock; the impacts of water now threaten to destroy that rich historic record, challenging us to respect natural forces while protecting our cultural heritage.

The 1,000-year-long human record preserved on Inscription Rock documents the stories of cultural interactions in the pre-Columbian Southwest, New Spain, and New Mexico; no other single site offers such a diverse panorama of American history.

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Great Sand Dunes National Monument contains the tallest dunes in North America (over 700 feet high) and one of the most complex dune systems in the world created by the continuing interaction of wind, sand, and water.

The dunes are an internationally significant high-altitude, seasonally cold climate eolian system.

The creeks that flow near the dunes support a consistent surge flow that is a unique hydrologic phenomenon.

The monument's 38,000 acres support a great diversity of plants and animals, spanning desert to montane life zones.

The dunes represent a unique high desert habitat that supports at least three known endemic insect species: the Great Sand Dunes Tiger Beetle, a species of Darkling Beetle, and an unnamed Flower Beetle.

The park provides a unique opportunity for recreation and play without fear of damage to the dunes or adjacent water resources.

The unexpected combination of massive dunes surrounded by alpine peaks, a desert valley, and creeks flowing on the surface of the sand make Great Sand Dunes a unique American landscape that inspires an emotional response.

Great Sand Dunes has been identified as an area of special importance by people of various cultures.

Great Sand Dunes is situated along a major historic route into the San Luis Valley.

Great Sand Dunes contain rare Clovis/Folsom archeological sites and the largest known stand of culturally scarred ponderosa pine.

The landscape of Great Sand Dunes National Monument and the extensive surrounding areas characterized by vast, primitive mountains and rural rangeland offer a rare opportunity to experience this national treasure in a harmonious setting.

Great Sand Dunes National Monument, particularly the backcountry, offers exceptional solitude, quiet, and an unspoiled day and night sky dome. These exceptional values are further complemented by the current levels of visitation, which have resulted in a spacious and uncongested experience.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The unexpected combination of massive dunes surrounded by alpine peaks, a desert valley, and creeks flowing on the surface of the sand makes Great Sand Dunes National Monument a unique landscape that inspires awe, mystery, and wonder.

Though the active dune field appears stark and empty, Great Sand Dunes National Monument is actually a rich and complex environment with a great diversity of plants and animals living in a variety of distinctive natural communities, creating opportunities for unique experiences, personal exploration and recreation, scientific discovery, and enjoyable learning.

The tall dunes and the life they support are the most visible indicators of the health of an ecosystem that extends far beyond monument boundaries; to protect the ecological health of the park, Great Sand Dunes National Monument must partner with the larger community in managing the whole.

Just as human survival is dependent upon water, this complex, dynamic dune ecosystem, with its distinctive geological and biological character, is dependent on the area's rare, fragile, and pristine water system for its continued existence.

The same physical characteristics that influenced the formation of the sand dunes created a major cultural crossroads, resulting in a landscape of special significance to many people over thousands of years.

Tumacácori National Historical Park

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Tumacácori National Historical Park represents a continuum of rich traditions and cultures influenced by mission life.

Tumacácori National Historical Park illustrates how many diverse groups interacted over time and continue to interact today.

The area's rare riparian resources sustained and influenced native ways of life and were factors in the mission system taking root here.

The missions of Tumacácori National Historical Park exemplify the work of Father Kino, other Jesuits, and Franciscan missionaries.

All three sites contain substantial original fabric — both visible and below the surface.

Guevavi is the first Jesuit cabecera in Arizona.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The presence of water (reliable springs and intermittent streams) in arable valleys in the harsh Sonoran Desert set the stage for human survival: initial habitation, the missions that followed, and the communities that exist today.

Traditions and cultures of those who lived here — their conflicts and cooperative actions and the enduring common qualities of humanity are evident.

Tumacácori National Historical Park provides opportunities to personally discover and experience today's rich regional culture, which is a result of the interaction of many different cultures over time.

Tumacácori National Historical Park evokes strong memories and associations for those with historical or ancestral ties to the missions, community, and/or region.

Fire Island National Seashore

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Fire Island National Seashore is a relatively natural seashore area near large concentrations of urban populations and containing no paved road.

Seventeen private communities help define the cultural character of Fire Island National Seashore.

The Fire Island Light Station tells the story of the lifesaving ethic embodied in the U.S. Lighthouse Service, the U.S. Life Saving Service, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

The William Floyd Estate, associated with General William Floyd, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was owned and occupied by the Floyd family for 250 years; tangible features from all periods are preserved and interpreted there.

The Sunken Forest is a 250-300 year old American holly-shadblow-sassafras maritime forest considered to be at or near climax.

The Otis Pike Fire Island Wilderness contains a variety of barrier island ecosystems in a relatively natural state, and is the only federal wilderness in the State of New York.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

William Floyd's bravery in signing the Declaration of Independence exemplifies the tension between feelings of loyalty and desire for liberty that characterized the struggle of the American Revolution.

The Fire Island Light Station, protecting a major maritime approach to New York Harbor, embodies the ethic of life-saving and the evolution of communication and navigation.

The constantly changing nature of barrier islands is a dramatic example of how dynamic natural processes create diversity and stability.

Fire Island National Seashore is an ongoing experiment exploring how people can live and recreate responsibly in a complex and dynamic barrier island environment.

The Fire Island Wilderness and the Sunken Forest provide opportunities to millions of urban and suburban visitors for exploration, discovery, recreation, and solitude.

Fire Island National Seashore provides a window into an isolated maritime environment characterized by distinctive island communities dominated by the dangers and opportunities wrought by the sea.

The diverse cultural resources of the William Floyd Estate provide a dynamic moving picture of over 250 years of one influential American family's life.

Fort Bowie National Historic Site

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Fort Bowie began as a strategically placed outpost and evolved into the command center of United States military operations against the Chiricahua Apaches.

Fort Bowie National Historic Site preserves the ruins of the original and subsequent constructions of Fort Bowie.

Fort Bowie National Historic Site preserves a rich concentration of important historic sites in a landscape of high integrity; including the locations of:

- 1854 Parke Railroad Survey campsite
- Butterfield Stage station and improved road
- Bascom Affair
- 1861 wagon train massacre
- Battle of Apache Pass
- Fort Bowie post cemetery
- Chiricahua Apache Indian Agency
- Apache Spring
- Apache Pass

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The proximity of Apache Pass to Apache Spring gave rise to an environment conducive to many important historic events that continue to affect the destinies of those living in southeast Arizona and beyond.

The clash of cultures and the subsequent Apache Wars resulted in expanded opportunities for entrepreneurs at the expense of the Chiricahua Apaches who lost their homeland.

Fort Bowie National Historic Site provides an opportunity to understand the history of the Apache Wars through the experiences of those who participated in the events.

Chiricahua National Monument

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Chiricahua National Monument contains one of the most spectacular and extensive areas of rhyolitic pinnacles and spires in the world.

Chiricahua National Monument protects part of the Sierra Madre “sky island” complex — one of the three major “megadiversity” areas found in the world where four major biomes intersect each other (Sierra Madre, Rocky Mountain, Chihuahua Desert, and Sonora Desert).

Chiricahua National Monument is a Congressionally mandated wilderness area.

Chiricahua National Monument preserves exceptionally clean air and low levels of light and noise that enhance biodiversity, scenic viewsheds, and night sky viewing.

Chiricahua National Monument preserves the transition from prehistoric peoples to Chiricahua Apaches to 19th century pioneer settlers to the mid-20th century (Faraway Ranch) including an Army encampment used during the Geronimo campaign, a homestead, a working cattle/guest ranch, and related artifacts.

Chiricahua National Monument contains one of only two known monuments created by Buffalo Soldiers.

Chiricahua National Monument preserves the location of a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp as well as CCC-built stone structures and trails listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Begun with an afternoon’s violent deposition of white-hot ash, the spectacular rhyolite formation of Chiricahua National Monument has been sculpted by erosion through the ages, and continues to be sculpted today as a living work-in-progress.

Chiricahua National Monument is centered at a crossroads of four major environments (Sierra Madre, Rocky Mountain, Chihuahua Desert, and Sonora Desert), providing opportunities to explore and study a surprisingly accessible wilderness of richly diverse plant and animal life where natural processes continue relatively unaffected by human influence.

The lack of major human enterprise and development, and the history of rural lifestyles, have protected the land in and around Chiricahua National Monument and its wilderness character of clean air, low noise, and clear night skies, all of which contribute to opportunities for rejuvenation and contemplation.

The rich and enduring heritage of the land in and around the Chiricahua Mountains is a testament to how the area’s inhabitants have left their mark on the land and, in turn, have been changed by it.

Capulin Volcano National Monument

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Capulin Volcano is a classic cinder cone and striking example of a recent volcano.

Capulin Volcano is part of the geologically diverse Raton-Clayton Volcanic Field, the easternmost Late Cenozoic volcanic field in North America.

Capulin Volcano provides for scientific investigation, interpretation, education and accessible visitor experience of a volcano.

The geology and environment of Capulin Volcano contributes to regional biodiversity with a rich variety of species within a relatively small area.

The dramatic view from the volcano rim connects people with a landscape that gives context to the geology of Capulin Volcano and human use of land.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Dramatic yet accessible, Capulin Volcano invites people to explore an exceptional cinder cone volcano, and offers rare opportunities for scientific research, educational study, and personal inspiration.

The geologically diverse Late Cenozoic eruptions of the Raton-Clayton Volcanic Field created an evocative and evolving landscape that opens the door to an understanding of how volcanism shapes our world.

The volcanic nature of the Capulin landscape, which initially devastated resident lifeforms, now provides a variety of habitats supporting an unusually rich flora and fauna.

Capulin Volcano and the Raton-Clayton Volcanic Field of which it is a part provide opportunities to explore how people have learned to live and prosper in a volcanic landscape — an environment often thought of as hostile and barren.

El Malpais National Monument

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Repeated episodes of volcanic activity at El Malpais have created an unusually diverse and well preserved basaltic lava field featuring:

- One of the longest lava tube systems
- Ice caves
- Flow top features
- Cinder features
- Tree molds

The volcanic landscape of El Malpais has created and maintained a wilderness of dramatic contrasts, subtle diversity, and unusual associations of landforms, flora, fauna, and human use.

Characteristics of the volcanic terrain have created an unusual woodland community including the oldest living Douglas fir trees yielding the longest tree ring chronology and longest continuous climate record in the Southwest.

The many special environments/habitats of

El Malpais have provided a living laboratory that has produced significant scientific discoveries and promises more.

El Malpais provides an opportunity to explore a long history of cultural interactions between:

- Mogollon and Anasazi
- Zuni, Acoma, Navajo, and Laguna
- Hispanic, Anglo, Indian, European, and Middle East

El Malpais National Monument and National Conservation Area provide opportunities to study Chacoan culture at its southernmost fringes.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The complex geological history (specifically volcanism) at El Malpais has created an unusually diverse landscape with unique ecosystems, which have yielded significant scientific discoveries and promise more.

The El Malpais area has a long history of inhabitation by more than one cultural group at a time; this history of interaction and adaptation has created and continues to support a rich cultural mix.

The many conditions and unusual environments of El Malpais has created a diverse wilderness providing varied opportunities for exploration, discovery, and solitude.

San Antonio Missions National Historical Park

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

San Antonio Missions National Historical Park contains the nation's most concentrated and diverse collection of Spanish colonial mission cultural resources that support the values associated with their history and continued use.

The mission was a vocational education center, instructing the Indian converts so they would have a livelihood within the Spanish frontier society. (Mission San Francisco de la Espada, Rancho de Las Cabras)

The mission was an economic center, with the contributions of its farmlands, ranches, and tradesmen in the development of the region. (Mission San Juan Capistrano, Rancho de Las Cabras)

The mission was a religious center designed to spread the tenets of Roman Catholicism. (Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Acuña)

The mission was a social center for the acculturation of the natives to Spanish society. (Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo)

The mission was a defensive center protecting Spain's interests in the Colonial Spanish Empire. (Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo)

Culture and environment dictated the development, construction, and use of the mission structures during the Spanish Colonial period and afterwards. (Architecture, archeology, post-mission history)

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

In the European contest for the Americas, the Spanish throne utilized the powers and resources of Church and State to expand the empire by establishing missions with the objective of religious conversion and acculturation of indigenous people.

While the more far-flung settlements to the north and east failed, the characteristics of the San Antonio River and a concentration of native peoples responsive to the benefits of the mission system enabled the San Antonio Missions to become a self-sustaining outpost on the frontier of New Spain

The San Antonio missions system accelerated the encounter, adaptation, and assimilation of cultures that created a dynamic, complex, and diverse community that continues to evolve today.

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

The attack at Washita was the first implementation of a strategic policy adopted by the U.S. Army to strike encampments of Plains Indians in winter when they were most vulnerable.

The attack at Washita was a milestone in the struggle of the Great Plains tribes to maintain the freedom of their traditional lifeways.

The attack at Washita greatly impacted two prominent individuals: Chief Black Kettle, widely known for his pursuit of peaceful co-existence with whites, lost his life; Lt. Col. George Custer, already known for his exploits during the Civil War, gained a reputation as an aggressive Indian fighter.

Washita has special significance for the Cheyenne people who regard the site as hallowed ground because of what transpired there.

The cultural landscape of the Washita site possesses a high degree of integrity.

The attacks at Sand Creek, Washita, and Little Bighorn document the escalation of hostilities between whites and Plains Indians resulting from the failures of the treaty system.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The attack at Washita was a clash between two cultures whose beliefs were so different and incompatible that violent conflict was inevitable.

The attack at Washita was the first implementation of a strategic decision by the U.S. Army, who had been unsuccessful in engaging Indian combatants, to launch a “total war” campaign against the Southern Plains Indians by striking winter encampments when Indian communities were most vulnerable.

The attack at Washita was controversial at the time it occurred and remains controversial today: the United States military and many civilians hailed it as a victory in the struggle to reduce Indian raids on frontier settlements; Indians and many whites labeled the attack a massacre — unprovoked and unjust.

Chief Black Kettle’s life was filled with irony: he was a major proponent for peace, signing three treaties between 1861 and 1867, yet he was attacked twice, at Sand Creek and Washita.

General Philip Sheridan felt that Lt. Col. George Custer’s aggressiveness was key to the successful implementation of the Army’s new strategy against the tribes of the Southern Plains; Custer’s victory catapulted him into the public imagination as a great Indian fighter and, ironically, encouraged the headstrong behavior that led to his demise at Little Bighorn.

The attack at Washita and the resulting death of Chief Black Kettle were pivotal events in the evolving relationships between the Cheyenne people, white settlers, and the U.S. government.

The hallowed ground of Washita provides opportunities to understand the resiliency of the human spirit and the struggle of societies to maintain cultural identity.

Rocky Mountain National Park

SET OF SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Rocky Mountain National Park's resources possess unusually high quality and integrity.

Natural processes here operate to create an environment of outstanding scenic beauty where the ecosystems of the southern Rocky Mountains exist in unusually close proximity to one another.

Rocky Mountain National Park's vast expanse of spectacular mountain terrain at the crest of the continent beckons to people from around the world.

This scenic landscape has a long history of providing human populations along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains with intimate wilderness experiences.

SET OF PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Natural systems and processes operate here to create an environment of great scenic beauty and diverse flora and fauna providing outstanding opportunities for recreation, learning, and spiritual renewal.

Rocky Mountain National Park's spectacular mountain wilderness at the crest of the continent beckons to people from around the world and creates a sense of connection, memory, and affection that can strengthen the ethic of stewardship.

Rocky Mountain National Park serves as a biological benchmark of international significance aiding understanding of the interconnectedness of the Earth's resources and the importance of national parks as outdoor laboratories where the health of the planet can be assessed.

Human use of this land has evolved over time from an economy based on resource extraction to an economy based on tourism and recreation, presenting us with the continuing challenge of balancing human use with resource preservation.

The area that is now Rocky Mountain National Park was home to Indian peoples for thousands of years and, though they were removed to reservations, it continues to be a sacred place for Uintah and Ouray Ute and Northern Arapahoe peoples and is still important to their sense of cultural identity.

ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATION RESPONSIBILITIES OF INTERPRETATION

Visitors to Rocky Mountain National Park will better enjoy their visit if we can help them become oriented to the park in ways that enhance their visit. The National Park Service is interested in reducing the number of accidents in national parks by providing visitors with up-to-date outdoor safety and appropriate wilderness use information.

As the United States' primary preservation organization, the National Park Service is responsible for providing for the protection, use, and enjoyment of those natural, scenic, and cultural resources that most clearly define our national character. The history of the National Park System and the mission of the National Park Service are important aspects of the interpretive program of national parks.

Universal concepts are essential components of both primary interpretive themes and subthemes

Universal concepts are powerful because in just a word — love, family, war, honor, education, sacrifice — so many different meanings are instantly accessed. Using universal concepts in both primary interpretive themes and subthemes *is* interpreting from multiple points of view, another tenet of the National Park Service Interpretive Development Program. That's part of the tremendous effectiveness of using universal concepts in interpretive work — it enables a wide range of people with diverse life experiences to become engaged in the place, in the program, in the exhibit.

It should be noted that including universal concepts does not, in itself, guarantee that an interpretive theme will be useful. Simply using words that convey universal concepts is usually too broad an approach — unless you really intend to focus on everything those words represent, which is probably impossible. Context is also an important consideration that should not be overlooked when developing interpretive theme statements. An example:

Residents sacrificed their homes and lands for the creation of a national park near a majority of the United States population.

The universal concept of *sacrifice* is very powerful, but appears above without much explanatory detail or context. Such ambiguity may lead interpreters to misunderstand the underlying significances of this interpretive theme. They may be led, through the theme's ambiguity, to associate a range of ideas with this theme that may not relate to the park's resources. A better description of this idea would be something like this:

Established at the height of the Great Depression, and created through the displacement and disruption of many individuals and communities, Shenandoah National Park is an outstanding example of how people collectively struggle to balance the rights of individuals with the needs of society as a whole.

Although the universal concept of sacrifice is absolutely represented in this interpretive theme, the word itself is not actually used. Instead, the idea is developed much more fully to add detail and context, creating a much richer opportunity for dialog about all of the ideas, meanings, beliefs, and values related to this universal concept, and the park resources that make this one of the best places in the nation to discuss these particular ideas. •

Developing subthemes from the park's set of primary interpretive themes

A subtheme is derived from a primary interpretive theme, is narrower in scope, and deeper in its treatment of the particular aspects of the resources it addresses. Like primary interpretive themes, subthemes link tangible resources to intangible ideas and meanings, and include universal concepts to increase interpretive effectiveness. Usually, the highest level of National Park Service planning document that contains subthemes is the Comprehensive Interpretive Plan, where subthemes are sometimes included to clarify and expand upon primary themes. As the central ideas around which specific interpretive services are developed, subthemes are also found in service-group planning documents of all types (exhibit plans, wayside exhibit plans, education plans, etc.) and documentation for specific preparations (individual service plans and outlines for interpretive talks, guided walks, site bulletins, exhibits, etc.).

Please see the following page for a workshop handout describing subthemes.

Developing subthemes

How are subthemes defined?

Each subtheme is derived from a primary interpretive theme, is narrower in scope, and deeper in its treatment of the particular aspects of the resources it addresses. There is no end to the number of useful subthemes that can be derived from a sound primary interpretive theme. Like primary interpretive themes, subthemes link tangible resources to intangible ideas and meanings, and include universal concepts to increase interpretive effectiveness. Subthemes are the driving elements in the development of specific interpretive services.

How are subthemes used?

A subtheme gives additional guidance and direction at the level of individual service plans and specific presentations. Because it is narrower in scope than a primary interpretive theme, a subtheme provides a more useful focus for the exploration of ideas afforded by a given interpretive service.

Subthemes are essential to the development of specific preparations — the actual activities or media available to visitors. Since effective story moves from the specific to the general, interpreters regularly employ subthemes (which are routinely narrower in scope) to help visitors connect with a significant aspect of park resources. Sometimes specific preparations address one, or even all, of a park's primary interpretive themes. But when that is the case, the treatment is necessarily introductory in nature, and is intended to lead visitors to other services and resources. An introductory park brochure or general park video are examples of such introductory services.

Subthemes are valuable because they allow specific interpretive services to achieve greater depth. Proceeding from a narrow focus, the interpreter can help visitors explore more subtle and complex aspects of specific park resources. This allows understanding at a more sophisticated level, and helps visitors extrapolate their new knowledge from the specific to the general. Because all subthemes are derived directly from primary themes, the set of services offered the public necessarily supports understanding and appreciation of resource significances — the intended outcome of the program.

How are subthemes expressed?

Like primary interpretive themes, subthemes are best written as single sentences.

What are useful subthemes?

The following questions should be asked about

each draft subtheme to ensure its quality and usefulness:

- Has the subtheme been derived from a primary interpretive theme?
- Does this theme go beyond just a restatement of the facts; does it include tangibles, intangibles, and universal concepts?
- Is this theme useful in accomplishing the desired outcome of increasing visitor understanding and appreciation of the significances inherent in the park's resources?
- Is the subtheme a complete, understandable sentence?

Examples. *The following statements were written by the authors for the purposes of instruction only and may not represent actual subthemes used by the park.*

Primary theme (one of five in the set):

The approachable, active volcanoes of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park allow first-hand discovery and connection with one of the most fundamental forces of our world — in both its creative and destructive roles.

Subthemes of this primary theme:

The unusually high approachability to the park's active volcanism not only affords opportunities for personal exploration, but for fundamental and detailed research that benefits us all.

Landforms created by the volcanic activity of Kilauea and Mauna Loa sensationally demonstrate the role of volcanism in shaping and reshaping Earth's surface, and deepens our understanding of other planetary bodies.

Earthquakes, tsunamis, ash and debris fallout from eruptions — consequences of volcanic activity — have at times been disastrous for humans, but have also provided opportunities for people to thrive.

A civilization-enriching aspect of science is introducing and testing new ideas: Mauna Loa and Kilauea exemplify the theory that volcanic activity above a fixed hot spot in the Earth's interior built the Hawaiian Islands, a relatively new idea.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

Developing interpretive services from subthemes

Interpretive services are always developed from interpretive themes. That ensures that the direct linkage from resource significances to the story format of primary interpretive themes to the depth and focus of subthemes remains intact. Consciously building an interpretive service around the framework of a well-crafted primary interpretive theme also prevents the desired outcome of the service from being overshadowed or deflected by interpretive medium, technique, or personality. Exploring meanings remains the central goal — and maximizes the value of the interpretive service toward fulfilling the mission of interpretation.

Ideas for specific interpretive services flow from interpreters' familiarity with park resources. Initial inspiration may spring from many sources: an often-asked question, a dramatic viewshed, a new discovery, etc. Regardless of origin, the design and presentation of every interpretive service must be driven by the strategic decision to tell a story that provides opportunities for people to explore meanings.

Please see the following three pages for workshop handouts describing the linkages between primary interpretive themes, subthemes, and interpretive services.

Primary themes, subthemes, and interpretive services

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

Set of Primary Interpretive Themes

The approachable, active volcanoes of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park allow first-hand discovery and connection with one of the most fundamental forces of our world — in both its creative and destructive roles.

The journeys of the Hawaiian peoples, who continue to inhabit these rich and diverse lands, include cultural clashes, adaptations, and assimilations that provide enduring lessons about ...

In Hawai'i, active volcanism created an isolated home for a few immigrant species that gave rise to a rich yet fragile endemic biota; due to the accelerating change brought about by human actions, ...

Kilauea, the home of Pele, is sacred to many Native Hawaiians: it is a place of birth and the well-spring of many spirits and forces; the active volcanism, the features of the terrain, and the ...

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park provides an opportunity for people to experience the values of Hawai'i's diverse wilderness; the park's designation as a World Heritage ...

Example Subtheme

The unusually high approachability to the park's active volcanism not only affords opportunities for personal exploration, but for fundamental and detailed research that benefits us all.

A subtheme like this might best lend itself to an **interactive computer station** that graphically demonstrates how fundamental volcanic research benefits other scientific inquiries with which visitors are familiar, such as studies into dynamic global change like plate tectonics or climate patterns like the El Niño/La Niña effect.

Example Subtheme

Landforms created by the volcanic activity of Kilauea and Mauna Loa sensationally demonstrate the role of volcanism in shaping and reshaping Earth's surface, and deepens our understanding of other planetary bodies.

A subtheme like this might best lend itself to an **illustrated program** that shows varying landscapes of Earth, and then shows landscapes of other planets and moons (as mapped and photographed by NASA). Inspiring music might accompany the imagery, followed by an interpreter-led discussion about the similarities and differences in these landscapes.

Example Subtheme

Earthquakes, tsunamis, ash and debris fallout from eruptions — consequences of volcanic activity — have at times been disastrous for humans, but have also provided opportunities for people to thrive.

A subtheme like this might best lend itself to a **guided hike** across the flank of Kilauea, on a trail that transects a place of cultural significance to Native Hawaiians. The interpreter might draw visitors' attention to plant species that thrive in this environment, then discuss the connections of human populations to this place, and their successful lifeways.

Example Subtheme

A civilization-enriching aspect of science is introducing and testing new ideas: Mauna Loa and Kilauea exemplify the theory that volcanic activity above a fixed hot spot in the Earth's interior built the Hawaiian Islands, a relatively new idea.

A subtheme like this might best lend itself to an **interpretive talk**. Starting with the idea that the Hawaiian Islands are probably the best example on Earth of hot-spot volcanism, the interpreter might expand into procedures of scientific inquiry (hypotheses, testing, improved hypotheses), and end by asking about the benefits/detriments of science to society.

etc.

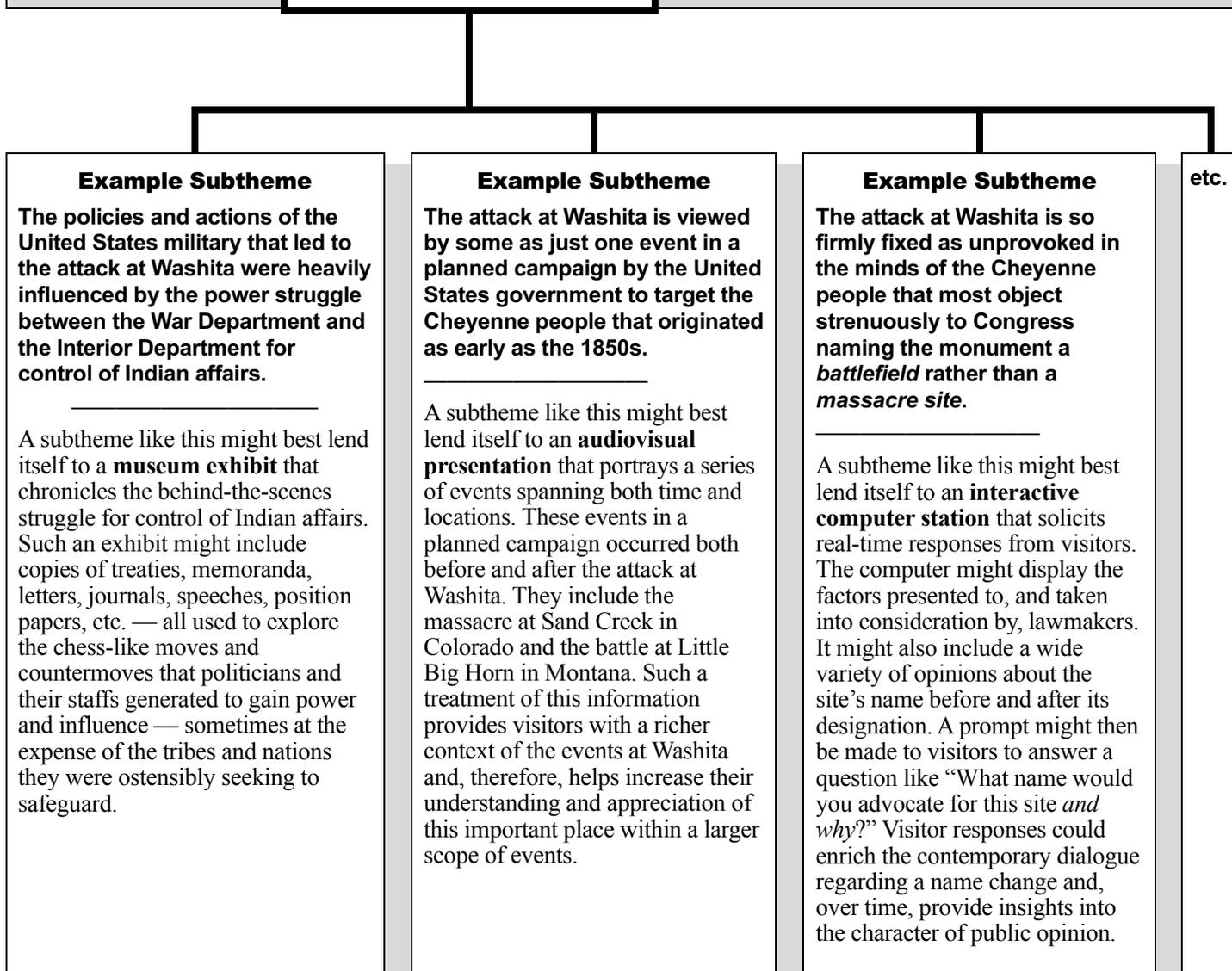
Note: Subthemes were written by the authors for the purposes of instruction only and may or may not represent actual subthemes used by the park.

Primary themes, subthemes, and interpretive services

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

Set of Primary Interpretive Themes

The Washita was a clash between two cultures whose beliefs were so ...	The attack at Washita was the first implementation of a strategic decision by the U.S. Army, who had ...	The attack at Washita was controversial at the time it occurred and remains controversial today: the United States military and many civilians hailed it as a victory in the struggle to reduce Indian raids on frontier settlements; Indians and many whites labeled the attack a massacre — unprovoked and unjust.	Chief Black Kettle's life was filled with irony: he was a major proponent for peace, signing three treaties ...	General Philip Sheridan felt that Lt. Col. George Custer's aggressive ness was key to the ...	The attack at Washita and the resulting death of Chief Black Kettle were pivotal events in the evolving ...	The hallowed ground of Washita provides opportunities to understand the resiliency of the ...
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Note: Subthemes were written by the authors for the purposes of instruction only and may or may not represent actual subthemes used by the park.

Primary themes, subthemes, and interpretive services

Chiricahua National Monument

Set of Primary Interpretive Themes

Begun with an afternoon's violent deposition of white-hot ash, the spectacular rhyolite formation of Chiricahua National Monument has been sculpted by erosion through the ages, and continues to be ...

Chiricahua National Monument is centered at a crossroads of four major environments (Sierra Madre, Rocky Mountain, Chihuahua Desert, and Sonora Desert), providing opportunities to explore and study a surprisingly accessible wilderness of richly diverse plant and animal life where natural processes continue relatively unaffected by human influence.

The lack of major human enterprise and development, and the history of rural lifestyles, have protected the land in and around Chiricahua National Monument and its wilderness character of clean air, low ...

The rich and enduring heritage of the land in and around the Chiricahua Mountains is a testament to how the area's inhabitants have left their mark on the land and, in turn, have been changed by it.

Example Subtheme

The fascinating plant and animal communities that thrive at the mouths of the canyons in Chiricahua National Monument provide insights into the special richness of life where different environments meet.

A subtheme like this might best lend itself to a **guided hike** that places visitors directly in these transition zones so rich with life. Special equipment loaned to visitors, such as **audio headset devices**, might enhance their experience. These devices enable the interpreter to directly interact with visitors while diminishing the overall auditory impact such a hike may have on the biota — therefore enabling visitors to experience more of the biota, especially the rich and diverse avian life for which Chiricahua National Monument is well known.

Example Subtheme

The desert and foothill environments at the park offer opportunities for U.S. visitors to get to know many plants and animals known mostly from Mexico, and to consider the factors limiting the home range of species.

A subtheme like this might best lend itself to a self-guiding trail's free **trail guide** and/or **biota checklist**. Both media provide an opportunity for visitors to personally explore and seek out particular biota. The range of information they include extends beyond that needed for identification only; they also include Mexican names, stories, ranges, life cycles, etc., associated with selected species.

Example Subtheme

Plants and animals face special challenges at Chiricahua due to the proximity of mountains and deserts; their success at meeting these challenges speaks to us of the resilience and persistence of life.

A subtheme like this might best lend itself to a series of **wayside exhibits** along park overlooks and trails. These exhibits might capitalize on more than the ability to address the biota at the particular site of each exhibit; they might also graphically depict how the biota have met these challenges through a range of adaptations tailored to the different environments experienced in the park.

etc.

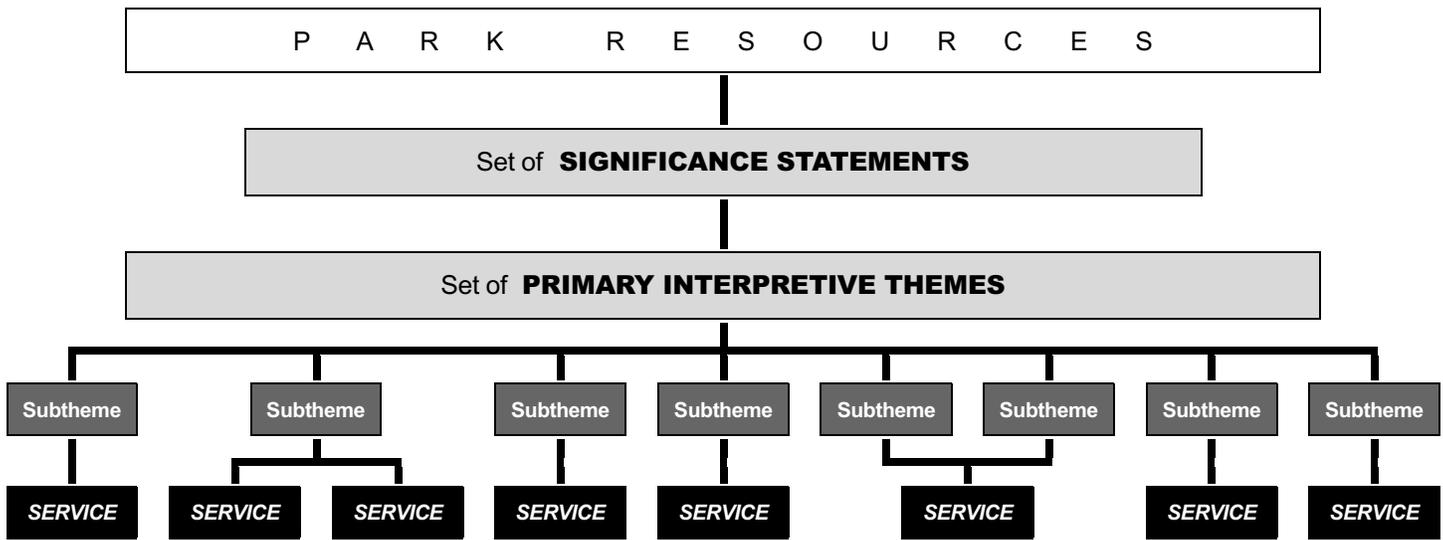
Note: Subthemes were written by the authors for the purposes of instruction only and may or may not represent actual subthemes used by the park.

How thematic interpretation works

Thematic interpretation is both a philosophy and a process. To be successful, thematic interpretation must begin with an understanding of the significances of a place, of a park. This understanding is expressed in the set of significance statements that are then translated into a story format that provides opportunities to explore those significances, to forge personal connections with them. This is accomplished through the development of the set of primary interpretive themes, which gives rise to subthemes. Subthemes are the framework around which specific interpretive services are built.

Please see the following page for a workshop handout that provides an overview of how thematic interpretation works.

How thematic interpretation works



How does thematic interpretation work?

Thematic interpretation is a progressive flow that begins with the resources of the park and ends with the comprehensive program of interpretive services offered to visitors. It is an unbroken chain that cumulatively builds on the significances of the park, and why this specific place is one of the best places to explore a particular set of meanings, as represented by the significances of those resources.

Significances are translated into story format in the largest, most overarching sort of way through the development of primary interpretive themes. The smaller stories that nest within these, the stories that are more narrowly focused and offer a more in-depth treatment of the meanings of a place — subthemes — are derived directly from the set of primary interpretive themes.

Each subtheme lends itself to specific kinds of expression (interpretive services) that will best facilitate visitors' exploration of the park's resources and their meanings. In the diagram above, each service block may be a wayside exhibit, park brochure, film, specific interpretive talk episode, etc.

Are tangible and intangible elements, and universal concepts always included in interpretive themes?

The construction of interpretive themes includes tangible and intangible elements, and universal concepts. Universal concepts enable a wide range of

people with diverse life experiences to become engaged in the place, in the program, in the exhibits. Tangibles, intangibles, and universals find expression not only in the interpretive themes, but also in the interpretive services that are themselves crafted from interpretive themes.

Interpretation is more than instruction; it fosters exploration.

The work of interpreters substantially differs from that of academicians. Professors often see their job as possessing answers — in fact, the *right* answers — which students must dutifully seek, receive, understand, and accept. Interpreters look at their job as providing opportunities for people to explore the ideas and meanings inherent in places and arrive at their own conclusions about them. This important concept was clearly articulated years ago when Freeman Tilden established that “The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.” as one of his six principles of interpretation. (*Interpreting Our Heritage*, University of North Carolina Press, 1957.)

This concept lives on in current interpretive philosophy, which consciously intends to more fully respect the individuality and independence of the visitor, and works toward providing that person with more tools for continued personal growth. This is an important tenet of the National Park Service Interpretive Development Program.

Essential Tools for Interpreters

Interp Guide

An introduction to the profession of interpretation as presented and conducted by the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service. *This publication explores the relationships between people, places, and interpretation — a useful introduction for those interested in better understanding the profession of interpretation. June 2001 edition; 8 pages.*

Theme Guide

A guide to the thematic approach to interpretation used by the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service. *This publication addresses significances, primary interpretive themes, subthemes, and theme-based interpretive services. It includes numerous park examples — complete sets of significance statements and the primary themes derived from them. An excellent resource for frontline interpreters, seasonal training, and theme workshops, this guide is a useful tool for all those involved in managing and conducting daily interpretive operations. June 2001 edition; 56 pages.*

Theme Guide

Abstract

A brief description of the thematic approach to interpretation used by the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service. *June 2001 edition; 8 pages.*

CIP Guide

A guide to the comprehensive interpretive planning process used by the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service. *This publication addresses how to conduct and implement comprehensive interpretive planning. It includes the appendix, “The Role of Cooperating Associations in Accomplishing the Interpretive Mission of Parks,” which serves as a guide to developing a Scope of Sales Statement for educational sales outlets in parks. June 2001 edition; 100 pages.*

CIP Guide

Abstract

A brief description of the comprehensive interpretive planning process used by the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service. *June 2001 edition; 12 pages.*

CIP Guide

Planner’s Assistant

Templates and other support materials useful to planners conducting the comprehensive interpretive planning process used by the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service. *June 2001 edition; 24 pages.*

The publications in this series are designed to be electronically distributed and printed using Microsoft Word 6.0/95[®] or newer version. The electronic files are formatted as “Word 97-2000 & 6.0/95 – RTF (*.doc).” Listed page counts are measured cover-to-cover. Updated publications are distributed as they are produced. Federal government agencies can download these files from the Intermountain Support Office Intranet page at “http://im.den.nps.gov/den_interptools.cfm”. Please direct inquiries and comments to the authors at:

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About the Authors

Richard Kohen is the Lead Interpretive Planner for the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service. He entered the Service in 1991 and worked in the areas of cultural resources, park planning, and ranger activities before joining interpretation in 1995. With a background in communication arts — theater, music, art direction, illustration, graphic design, typography, and sculpture — he draws from a rich palette to craft solutions to interpretive communication challenges. His special skill in organizing and clearly depicting processes is valuable in helping others achieve their desired outcomes.

Kim Sikoryak is a 25-year veteran with the National Park Service and has worked as Chief of Interpretation and Interpretive Specialist at parks and regional offices in Oregon, California, Hawaii, Colorado, and New Mexico. Kim's varied background in secondary and college education, public radio and television, field biology, and theater provides him with an opportunity to view interpretive challenges and opportunities from diverse, and sometimes unusual, perspectives. Since 1997 he has worked with Richard Kohen to develop a set of essential tools for interpreters that are tightly focused on outcomes, yet intimately tied to operational realities.



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Intermountain Support Office

Theme Guide: A guide to the thematic approach to interpretation used by the Intermountain Support Office of the National Park Service.

June 2001, February 2000.

Theme Guide is updated periodically in response to the evolving nature of the profession. This publication was written electronically using Microsoft Word 2000[®] and type families CG Times, Arial, and Arial Black. The file was formatted as version "Word 97-2000 & 6.0/95 – RTF (*.doc)," and was designed to print two-sided on a Hewlett-Packard LaserJet 5 Si NX printer.

Theme Guide