



# Foundation Document Overview

## Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

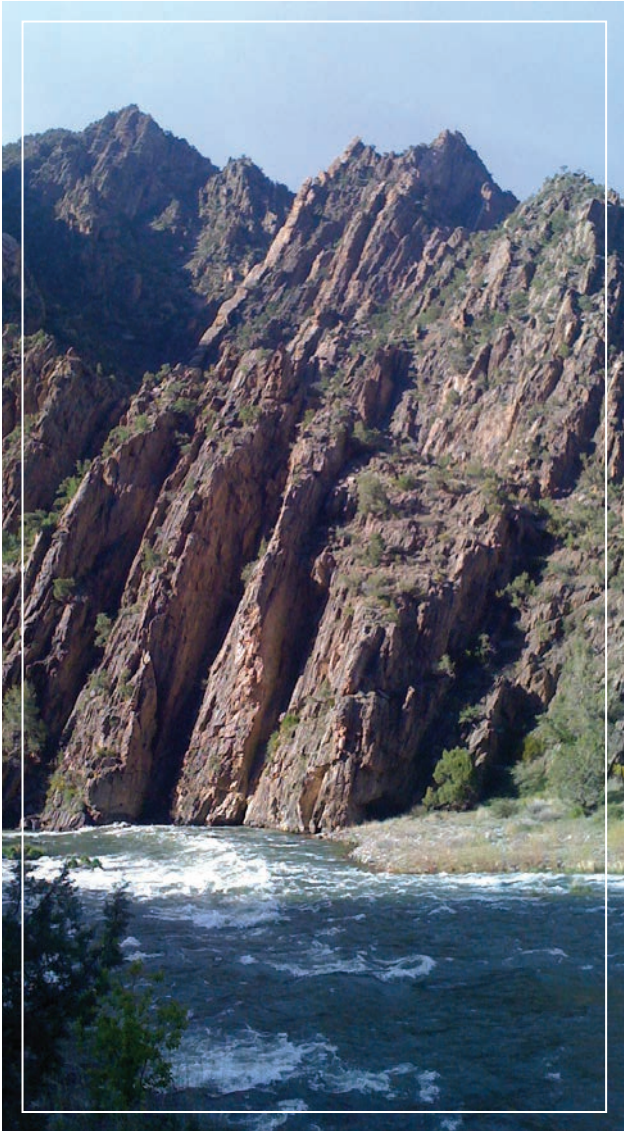
Colorado



### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park preserves an area encompassing spectacular gorges, the Gunnison River, and breathtaking landscapes by protecting its natural, cultural, and wilderness integrity for public benefit, inspiration, and enjoyment.*

## Significance

Significance statements express why Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The steeply descending Gunnison River, a major tributary of the Colorado River, shapes the complex natural and human histories of the park and surrounding region.
- The vertical, rugged nature of Black Canyon's inner canyon wilderness presents challenges requiring specialized skill and self-reliance, while providing exceptional opportunities for primitive, unconfined experiences.
- The narrow, vertical nature and sheer walls of Black Canyon, in contrast to the surrounding uplands, provide for unexpected and intimate views of one of the world's premier wild canyons.
- Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park protects canyon and upland environments that encompass old growth pinyon and sensitive species including hanging garden *Sullivantia*, Black Canyon gilia, Gunnison Sage-grouse, and peregrine falcons.
- Black Canyon, carved by the power of the Gunnison River and born from multiple episodes of uplift and erosion, is one of the steepest, deepest, and narrowest canyons in North America, and reveals 2,000 feet of Precambrian basement rock.



## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Black Canyon of the Gunnison: The Canyon Itself.**
- **Recreation.**
- **The Gunnison River and Its Roar.**
- **Wilderness.**
- **Native Plant and Wildlife Communities.**
- **Spectacular Views.**



Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Archeology.**
- **Paleontology.**
- **Cultural Landscapes.**

## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park— they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from — and should reflect — park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Geology.** Through a unique series of geologic events, the Gunnison River has carved one of the world's premier wild canyons.
- **Wilderness.** Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park preserves a vertical landscape at once both accessible and remote, providing rare opportunities for all visitors to experience the values of wilderness.
- **Water.** The Gunnison River provides a home for aquatic and riparian species in an atmosphere of development and politics of the American West.
- **Natural History.** Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park protects fragile resources along a vertical spectrum from canyon floor to dark skies.
- **Cultural History.** The rugged landscape of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park has challenged and limited human influence from pre-history to modern day.



# Description

Big enough to be overwhelming, yet intimate enough to feel the pulse of time, Black Canyon of the Gunnison exposes some of the steepest cliffs, oldest rock, and craggiest spires in North America. Over the past two million years, the Gunnison River, along with the forces of weathering, has sculpted this vertical wilderness of rock, water, and sky. The Black Canyon hosts a variety of ecosystems from piñon pine, juniper, and scrub oak forests at the rim, to the shady and vertical inner canyon walls, and down to the riparian community along the Gunnison River.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park is located on the Western Slope of the Rocky Mountains in west-central Colorado. The park is situated in the transition between the Colorado Plateau and Rocky Mountain provinces and hosts riparian habitats, steep canyons, sagebrush hillsides, and areas of ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and aspen.



## Black Canyon of the Gunnison

National Park  
National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

