



# Foundation Document Overview

## Death Valley National Park

California, Nevada



### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*The purpose of DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, homeland of the Timbisha Shoshone, is to preserve natural and cultural resources, exceptional wilderness, scenery, and learning experiences within the nation's largest conserved desert landscape and some of the most extreme climate and topographic conditions on the planet.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Death Valley 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.

- Death Valley National Park is known for its climatic and topographic extremes, including the highest scientifically recorded temperatures in the world, the least precipitation in the United States, and more than 11,000 feet of vertical relief from Telescope Peak (11,049 feet) to Badwater Basin (282 feet below sea level), the lowest point in North America. These extremes collectively result in exceptional biodiversity and a wide range of resilient desert ecosystems.
- Nearly 92% of Death Valley National Park's 3.4 million acres is designated wilderness and is the largest designated wilderness area outside of Alaska. Wilderness protects intact desert ecosystems and provides extensive backcountry opportunities for solitude and primitive adventures.
- Due to its size, extreme topography, and remoteness, Death Valley National Park provides outstanding opportunities for visitors to experience expansive scenic views, natural quiet, and some of the darkest night skies in the United States. The park has been recognized by the International Dark Sky Association as a Gold Tier Dark Sky Park.





## Significance



- From time immemorial, the area that now includes Death Valley National Park has been the homeland of Timbisha Shoshone. The tribe continues to shape the history, culture, and ecology of their ancestral homeland in partnership with the park.
- Death Valley National Park is home to the critically endangered Devils Hole pupfish. This iconic species was the subject of a controversial landmark Supreme Court decision first recognizing that beneficial use of water could include ecosystem protection and protection of an endangered species. The park's water rights are critical to the survival and continued flow of the springs and seeps in the park.
- The park's archeological sites, ethnographic resources, historic structures, and museum collections represent more than 10,000 years of human life in the extreme Death Valley environment and provide insight into human adaptation in the face of challenging conditions and its lasting impact on the desert landscape.
- Death Valley National Park contains an extraordinary and dynamic collection of exposed landforms and other geologic features that reveal the region's continuous geologic record from more than 1.7 billion years ago to the recent past, including Ubehebe Crater and other volcanic craters, cinder fields, Basin and Range topography, and the Eureka Dunes, the tallest sand dunes in California.

## 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.

- **Geology and Geologic Processes**
- **Hydrologic Processes**
- **Endemic Species and Biodiversity**
- **Land with Wilderness Character**
- **Opportunities to Experience Scenic Views, Dark Night Skies, and Natural Soundscapes**
- **Enduring Legacy of Human Interaction with the Landscape**
- **Death Valley Scotty Historic District**



# Description

Death Valley National Monument was established by presidential proclamation under the 1906 Antiquities Act, on February 11, 1933. The original monument contained approximately 1,601,800 acres. Supplemental proclamations in March 1937 and January 1952 increased the monument's acreage to 2,086,530 acres. The monument was subsequently enlarged and changed to Death Valley National Park by congressional action on October 31, 1994, with the passage of the California Desert Protection Act. Approximately 1.3 million acres of new lands were added, bringing the total acreage of the new park to about 3,399,470 acres. Nearly 92% of the park was designated as wilderness by that same act. Death Valley National Park is the largest national park unit in the contiguous 48 states. The park spans four counties across the states of Nevada and California, providing significant economic benefits to these rural communities. Although 95% of the park lies in California's Inyo and San Bernardino Counties, more than 100,000 acres lie in the Nevada counties of Nye and Esmeralda. California State Route 190 crosses the park east to west.

The park includes all of Death Valley, a 156-mile-long north/south-trending trough that formed between two major block-faulted mountain ranges: the Amargosa Range on the east and the Panamint Range on the west. Telescope Peak, the highest peak in the park and in the Panamint Mountains, rises 11,049 feet above sea level and lies only 15 miles from the lowest point in the United States in the Badwater Basin salt pan, 282 feet below sea level. The California Desert Protection Act added most of the Saline, Eureka, northern Panamint, and Greenwater Valleys to the park.

Death Valley National Park includes the lowest point in North America and one of the hottest places on Earth. It is also a vast geological museum, containing examples of most of Earth's geological eras. Plant and animal species, some of which occur nowhere else in the world, have adapted to the harsh desert environment. The diversity of Death Valley's plant and wildlife communities results partially from the region's location in the Mojave Desert, a zone of tension and overlap between the Great Basin Desert to the north and the Sonoran Desert to the south, as well as the great range of elevations found within the park.

Humans have adjusted to these severe conditions as evidenced by extensive prehistoric archeological sites; historical sites related to successive waves of prospectors, miners, and homesteaders; the recent resort developments and mines; and the present-day residence of the Timbisha Shoshone.

Perhaps the park's greatest assets today are the scenic views, vast open spaces that stretch toward distant horizons, and the overwhelming silence. More than 1.3 million people per year come to Death Valley National Park to experience the stark and lonely vastness of the valley; dark night sky viewing; the panorama of rugged canyons and mountains; the pleasures of the dry, moderate winter climate; the challenge of the hot, arid summer; hiking; backcountry driving; access to the cooler mountains; and the reminders of frontier and American Indian lifeways.

