NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Foundation Document Overview

Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve

Oregon

Contact Information

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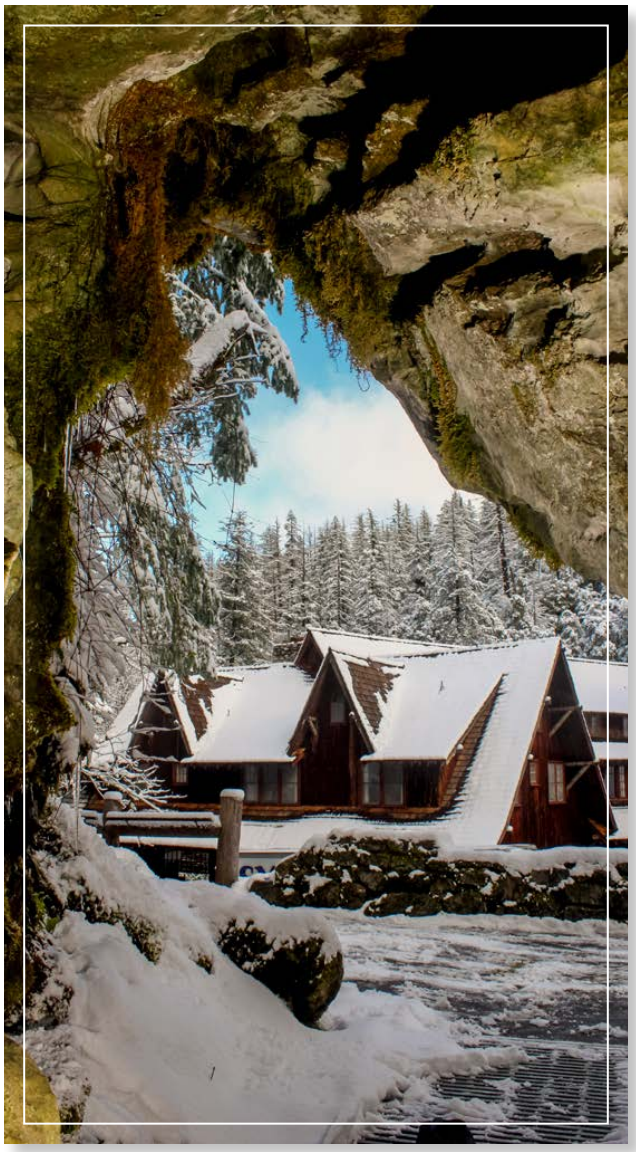
Purpose



Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve protects and preserves the scientific interest and the unusually diverse and concentrated biology and geology of an important solution cave system and watershed within the Siskiyou Mountains for the benefit, understanding, and enjoyment of the public.

Significance

Significance statements express why Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve 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.

- **Complex Geology.** Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve is an outstanding place to view one of the world's most complete and complex arrays of geology. Visitors can see beautiful glacial features, along with marble cave passages that were transformed deep within the earth.
- **Solution Cave Access.** Oregon Caves is an excellent example of solution cave geology in the Pacific Northwest region and is easily reachable by the public.
- **Fossils.** The cave possesses a significant collection of well-preserved fossils, including one of the oldest American grizzly bear bones, the remains of a jaguar, and a bone tentatively identified as being from a short-faced bear. There also is a unique assemblage of trace fossils and subfossils that record much older and more recent habitat change.

Fundamental Resources and Values

- **Historic Resources.** The Oregon Caves Chateau, a national historic landmark, and the Oregon Caves Historic District are outstanding examples of public and private efforts to develop, manage, and protect the monument's natural and recreational resources. The Chateau and designed landscape of the historic district exemplify the rustic–romantic architectural style of developed national park tourist facilities built in the early 20th century.
- **Genetic Biodiversity.** Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve contains a rich variety of habitat types that support unusually high genetic diversity, including one of the highest concentrations of endemics in North America and more single-cave endemics than any other cave in the western United States.
- **Climate History.** Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve protects dripstone chemistry and fossil deposits that record half a million years of detailed and accurate climate history and drastic climate change a quarter of a billion years ago. These caves thus provide an opportunity for scientific research and education about climate and habitat change.
- **Wild and Scenic Rivers.** Oregon Caves is home to the first subterranean National Wild and Scenic River, the River Styx. The River Styx and the other rivers in this watershed are critical to the sustained health of the cave and karst features.

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.

- **Fossils and Diversity of Features**
- **Endemic Species**
- **Geologic Features and Processes**
- **Biodiversity from Surface and Subterranean Interaction, Including Cave and Noncave Endemics**
- **The Chateau and the Historic District.**
- **Opportunity to Explore and Access the Complex Geology of the Cave System and Its Relationship to the Mountain Watershed**
- **Free-Flowing Water and Dependent Systems**

Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve 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.

- **Partnerships**

Description

Located in southwestern Oregon in the Siskiyou Mountains at 4,000 to 4,360 feet in elevation, there exists a dynamic system of marble caves with limestone formations that started forming 330,000 years ago through calcium carbonate deposition. In 1909, by presidential executive order, Oregon Caves and its surrounding environment were identified as nationally significant and designated as a national monument for the enjoyment of future generations.

The original designation was 480 acres. This small size almost immediately led to legislative proposals and plans for monument expansion so that the watershed that supports the caves, including old-growth mixed coniferous and deciduous forests, would be preserved.

The addition of the 4,070-acre national preserve, signed into law on December 19, 2014, by an act of Congress, included the surrounding watershed and forest, adding new visitor opportunities and cultural and natural resources to the park unit. Visitors to the national monument and preserve will see natural waterfalls, mountain and subalpine meadows, alpine rock gardens, dozens of vegetation communities, and vistas of Mount Shasta. Glacial features in the preserve include cirques, tarns, montane ponds, erratics, windblown loess deposits, hanging valleys, faceted boulders, and moraines.

Visitors to the park's main and only developed cave can tour through large twisted catacombs and view spectacular calcite-flowstone formations. During a tour with a guide, visitors can also learn about many other rich natural and cultural resource features of the caves and of the surrounding ecosystem.

The area is one of the most concentrated examples of geodiversity in this hemisphere due to the presence of tilted rock slabs from back-arc and forearc basins, mid-ocean ridges, island arcs, and rifting volcanism from sinking seafloors, all stacked by massive tectonic forces against the continent and soldered by granitic welding.

Five buildings and their associated landscape features, such as stone benches and original trails were designed and constructed by a private public partnership and are listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. The centerpiece of the historic district is the Chateau, a national historic landmark. This unique six-story, cedar bark-sided building was built in 1934 and still operates today, providing lodging and food service to park unit visitors. The nationally significant Chateau was designated a national historic landmark in 1987 because of its architecture and design.