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## Joshua Tree National Park

General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement  
 Scoping Newsletter 1

Spring / Summer 2010

National Park Service  
 U.S. Department of the Interior



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General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement  
 Scoping Newsletter

April 2010

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### Come to an Open House...

Come and meet the planning team, learn more about the general management plan and planning process, and most importantly, discuss your ideas and concerns for the future of Joshua Tree National Park. Please attend one or more of these open houses. We look forward to seeing and hearing from you!

Monday May 17, 6-8 p.m.	Mizell Senior Center 480 South Sunrise Way Palm Springs, CA 92262-7641
Tuesday May 18, 6-8 p.m.	University of California, Riverside, Palm Desert Campus 75080 Frank Sinatra Drive Palm Desert, CA 92211-5202
Wednesday May 19, 6-8 p.m.	Onaga Elementary School 58001 Onaga Yucca Valley, CA 92284
Thursday May 20, 6-8 p.m.	Twentynine Palms Community Center 74325 Joe Davis Drive Twentynine Palms, CA 92277
Friday May 21, 6-8 p.m.	Joshua Tree Community Center 6171 Sunburst Street Joshua Tree, CA 92252-2147

*Thank you for your support and interest in Joshua Tree National Park!*

### Dear Friends,

You are invited to participate in a process that will help guide the management of Joshua Tree National Park for the next 15 to 20 years. We are beginning the development of a new park management plan and we welcome your involvement. This newsletter provides information on this planning process, some of the park's key issues, and how you can get involved.

In many regards, Joshua Tree National Park can be described as a "transition" park. One very defining feature of the park is its location on the transition line between two major desert ecosystems, the Mojave Desert and the Colorado Desert. The park's location adjacent to the Coachella Valley and the Los Angeles basin also places it at a transition or interface between an urbanized landscape and a desert wilderness. In addition, the park lies along a geologic transition line of two tectonic plates, the San Andreas Fault, which contributed to shaping the park's rugged canyons and rock formations. The geographic location and palm oases of Joshua Tree National Park also made it a crossroads of several native cultures and European settlers over the centuries. Lastly, Joshua Tree National Park is expanding its use of alternative energy, representing the global transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

Now, in addition to these natural and cultural transitions, Joshua Tree National Park is entering a transition period for its management... the development of a new general management plan.

The last general management plan for Joshua Tree National Park was completed and approved in 1995. Since then, several new issues and challenges for the park have arisen. Through this planning process, we will chart the course for park management that will guide us through the next two decades. We will explore ways to protect the park's many unique and

sensitive natural and cultural resources from several threats, both internal and external to the park. In addition, while exploring ways to preserve these resources, we will seek ways to improve the quality of the visitor experience at the park by enhancing recreational, educational, and interpretive opportunities. In this process, we will also determine the appropriate amount, types, and locations of facilities and infrastructure at the park.

This plan will provide a vision for what the park will be like and look like in 20 years. It will provide guidance on how to address the challenges and opportunities that the park faces. Your involvement will be valuable and essential, as it will contribute to the preservation of the unique natural and cultural heritage of this park, and the incredible visitor opportunities the park provides.



The original creation of Joshua Tree National Monument in 1936 was inspired by the efforts of Minerva Hamilton Hoyt, the "Apostle of the Cacti." Mrs. Hoyt led a lifelong effort to raise public awareness of the need to protect desert landscapes. It is our responsibility and obligation to carry on this effort in the 21st century. We welcome you to join us in developing a plan that provides vision and direction for the future of Joshua Tree National Park. Please plan to attend one of the upcoming public meetings that will be held in communities around the park from May 17th - 21st, 2010 (see back page for details). We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Curt Sauer, Superintendent  
 Joshua Tree National Park  
 National Park Service

## What is a General Management Plan?

A General Management Plan (GMP) for a national park is a long-range plan that provides direction for future park management and decision making. The general management plan for Joshua Tree National Park will help guide park managers on how to protect resources, what types of park uses are appropriate, what facilities should be modified or developed, and how people should access the park. Everything in the plan must be consistent with the park's purpose and significance, as well as the legislation that established the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916, which directs the Park Service to protect the park's natural and cultural resources while inviting appropriate visitor use and enjoyment of the park. The general management plan will not include detailed building designs and it will not be able to guarantee funding, but it will serve as a blueprint that the park staff intends to follow for the next 15-20 years. The plan will include an environmental impact statement (EIS) that is prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the various management alternatives also will be analyzed in the environmental impact statement.



## CLIMATE CHANGE

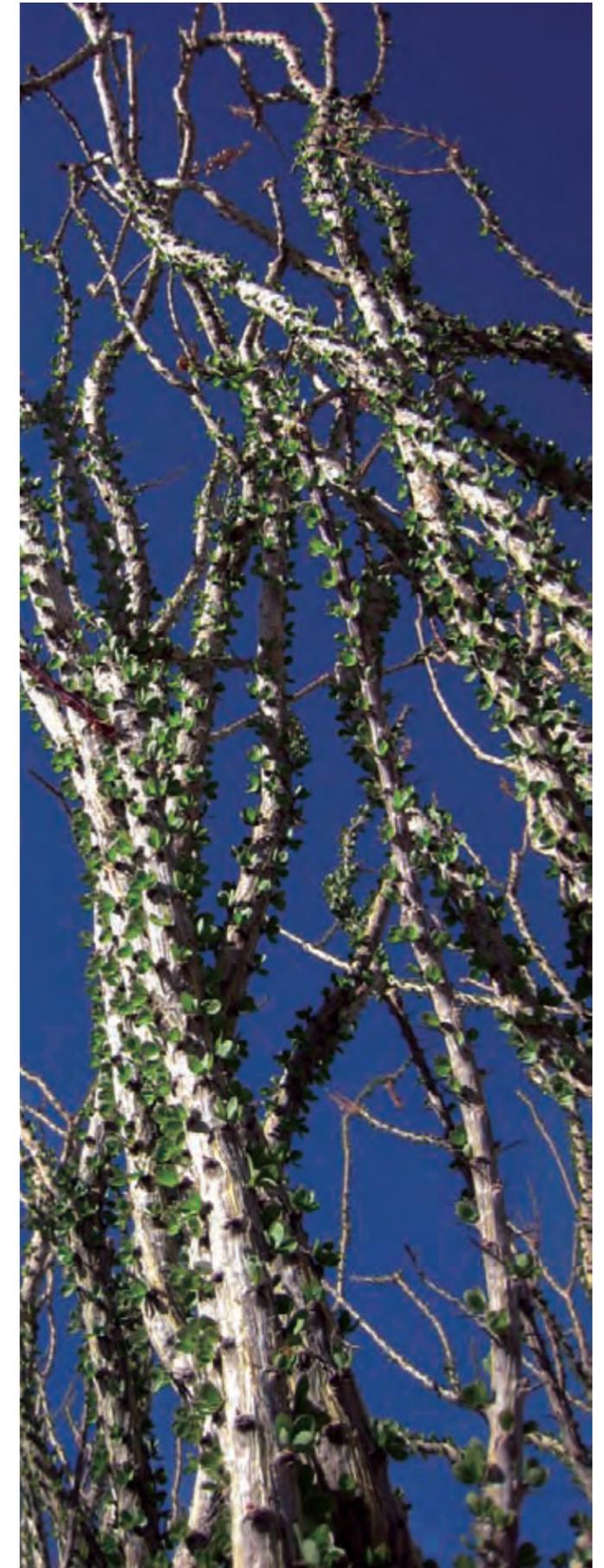
- What flora and fauna in the park are at greatest risk from global climate change?
- How should the park respond to the effects of climate change?
- What opportunities exist for the park to reduce its carbon footprint?

The effects of global climate change are anticipated to include changes in local weather patterns, temperature and precipitation trends, wildfire frequency, and distribution of plants and animals; and an increase in insect and pathogen infestations. The park's icon tree and the threatened desert tortoise may be especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Proactive planning and management can help the park adapt to these changes and their effects on park resources, operations, and visitors. Concurrently, the park can reduce its carbon footprint by changing the energy use patterns of park visitors and staff and by expanding its leadership role in using renewable energy and promoting the use of renewable energy in the national park system.

## EVALUATION OF PARK BOUNDARIES

- Does the current boundary adequately provide for the preservation and enjoyment of Joshua Tree National Park and its resources and values?
- Do opportunities exist to acquire additional lands that would better protect and preserve park resources or add other resources that are related to the park's purpose?

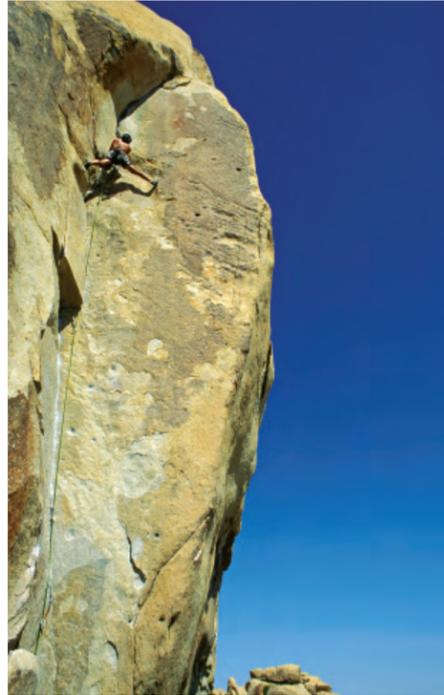
The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, as amended, requires that general management plans consider the adequacy of existing boundaries. In the context of Joshua Tree National Park, the plan could explore boundary modifications and additional designations, and would provide guidance for future cooperative agreements with adjacent federal lands and communities. For example, this analysis could consider the management of BLM land that abuts the northern park boundary or the establishment of cooperative recreational districts with adjacent cities or counties.



## REGIONAL LAND USE PLANNING: COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

- How will urban growth around the park perimeter affect park resources and values?
- What opportunities exist for collaborating with other agencies and organizations to address urban growth in Morongo Basin and Coachella Valley?
- What tools exist for minimizing the impacts from urban growth on park resources and values? (e.g., local ordinances, education, land acquisition)
- What undeveloped corridors around the perimeter of the park offer the most effective ecological and recreational connection from the park to other open lands in the region?

With the rapid and widespread urban growth in the Coachella Valley and Morongo Basin, urban growth adjacent to Joshua Tree National Park has become a major issue for the park. This development and growth threaten to sever many of the open land connections that link the park to other lands in the region. This could eventually turn Joshua Tree National Park into an island of wildlands, which could result in serious negative impacts on wildlife, rare plants, and even recreation opportunities. With even greater population growth and urban expansion anticipated in the next 20 years, the park staff faces several challenges to protect the park's resources and values from this ensuing growth. Proactive collaborations and partnerships are the most important attributes of effective regional land use planning. Developing a strong working relationship among the many organizations and governments in the region will improve information sharing (e.g., resource data, innovative policy ideas, etc.), increase consistency with land use and water policies in the region, and inspire cooperative efforts to protect critical corridors and acquire lands or conservation easements. This GMP planning process will provide opportunities and mechanisms that will help establish and nurture partnerships in the region. In turn, this collaboration could lead to effective regional planning decisions that benefit both the park and the surrounding communities.



## How Can You Be Involved in Planning for Joshua Tree National Park's Future?

There will be several opportunities throughout the general management plan process to share your thoughts and ideas with us. The table on page 5 indicates public opportunities for comment and review at key points in the planning process. Please let us know if you have thoughts, ideas and concerns about what should be addressed in the general management plan. It is important that we hear your ideas and concerns early in the planning process. The comment period for this stage of the planning process will extend through the summer of 2010.

Your continued involvement in the planning process is critical for the successful completion of the general management plan. You can always write or call us to voice your concerns or insights and to check in on the planning process. You can share your thoughts through e-mail to [JOTR\\_GMP@nps.gov](mailto:JOTR_GMP@nps.gov), or by phone at 760-367-5512.

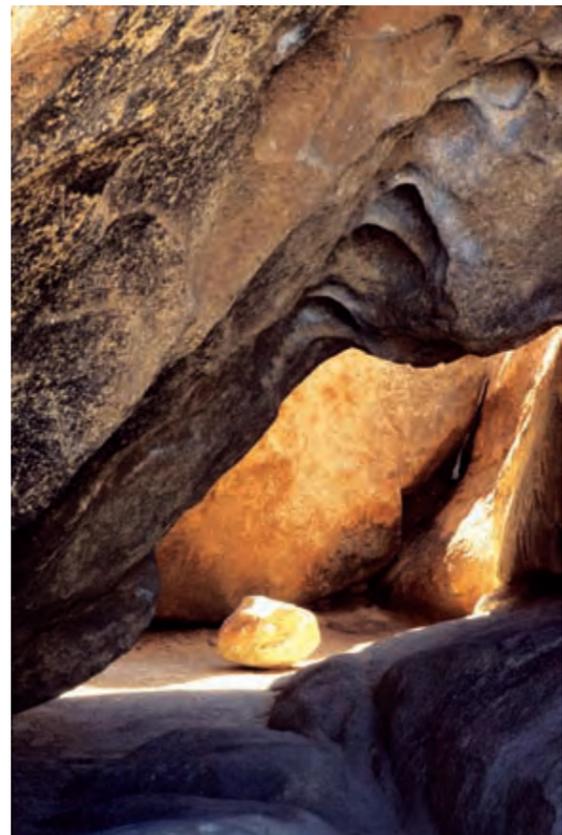
Here are several ways for you to participate throughout this planning effort:

- **Attend public workshops** in May 2010 (Scoping), 2011 (Preliminary Alternatives), and 2013 (Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement).
- **Access information** about the general management plan and provide your comments directly online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/jotr>.
- **Sign up on the mailing list** to receive publications about the general management plan. You can choose whether you would like to receive paper newsletters sent to your mailing address or e-newsletters sent to your e-mail address. To be included on the mailing list, please complete and mail the response form included in this newsletter.
- **Send a letter** to the Superintendent at Joshua Tree National Park  
74485 National Park Drive  
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277-3597
- **E-mail your comments** to [JOTR\\_GMP@nps.gov](mailto:JOTR_GMP@nps.gov).
- **Telephone the park** at 760-367-5512.





## Steps and Schedule of GMP Planning Process



## Preliminary Issues

### NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE PRESERVATION

- How can we preserve the many natural and cultural resources of the Joshua Tree National Park, while also providing for visitor use of the park?
- What natural and cultural resources are at greatest risk?

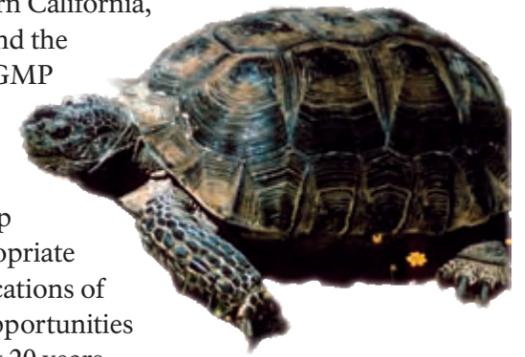
Joshua Tree National Park is home to an abundance of plants and animals that have adapted over the millennia to the two desert ecosystems that converge at the park: the Mojave and the Colorado. Similarly, the park also possesses a vast array of cultural resources, including sites that represent the Pinto Culture, various subsequent native cultures, as well as various aspects of European settlement. The park has a responsibility and obligation to perpetuate and protect these natural and cultural resources. The GMP planning process will highlight the most significant and sensitive resources, as well as determine the best way to preserve the resources while allowing visitors to enjoy the park.

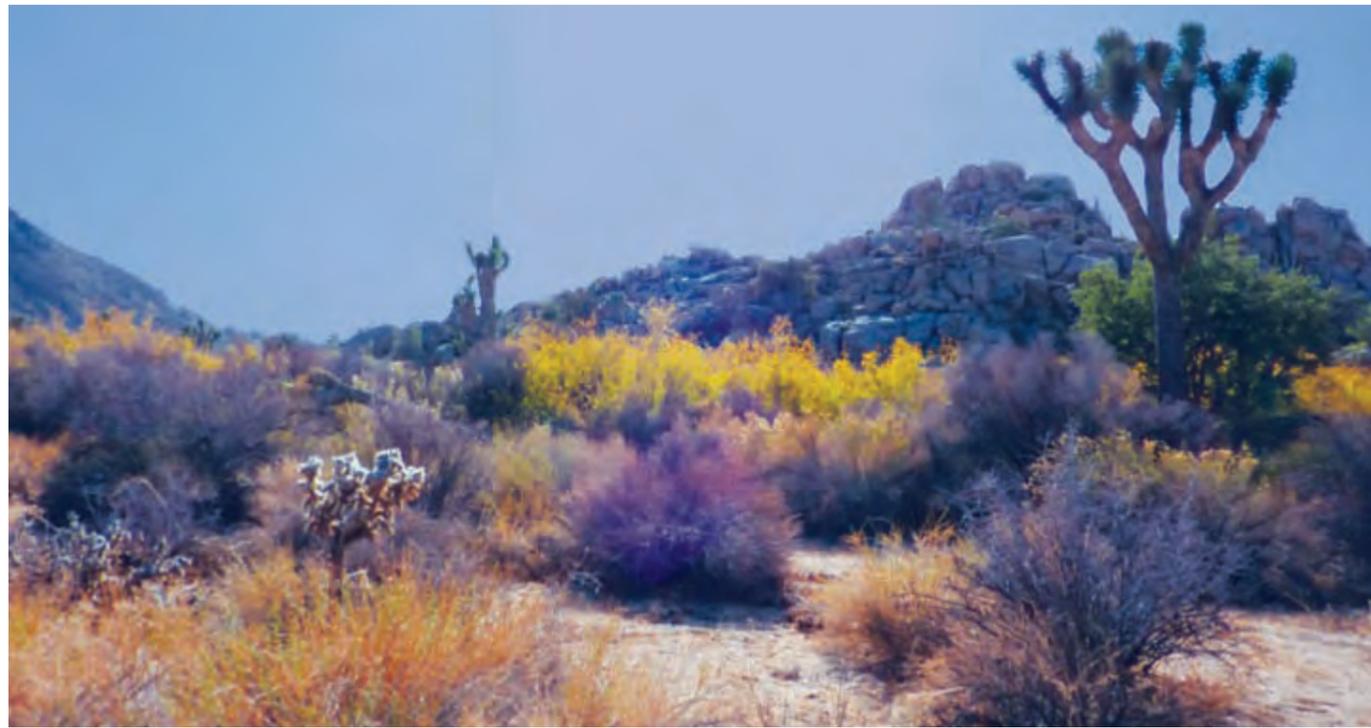


### VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE

- What visitor opportunities and levels of service should be provided in the future?
- How will the recreation demand of the growing population and changing demographics be accommodated, and where?
- What opportunities exist for expanding the park's education and stewardship program?

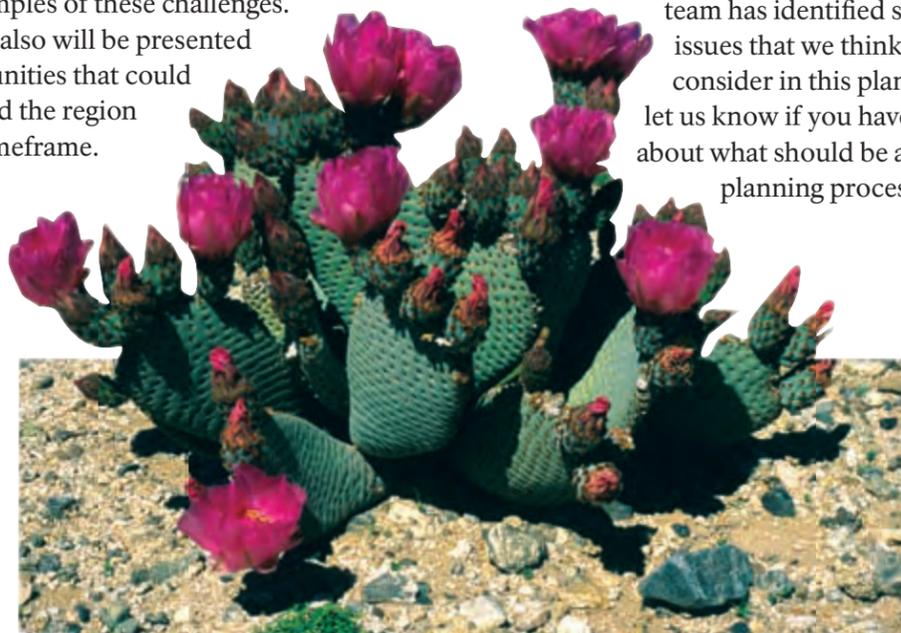
Joshua Tree National Park's diverse desert landscapes provide many opportunities for outdoor recreation and wilderness exploration for 1.3 million annual visitors. The natural, undisturbed desert expanse of the park offers visitors many options to learn about, relax in, appreciate, and explore nature. In addition, the rugged terrain of the park provides many opportunities for active recreation such as rock climbing, backcountry hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding. All of these visitor activities contribute to the park's value to people from Southern California, the nation, and the world. This GMP planning process will serve as a means to map out the appropriate types and locations of visitor use opportunities over the next 20 years.





## What are the Opportunities and Challenges that Face Joshua Tree National Park?

Joshua Tree National Park will face many challenges over the next 20 years. Some of the challenges will be internal to the park, such as balancing visitor use with resource preservation. Some of the biggest challenges will be external: urban encroachment and climate change are two prime examples of these challenges. However, the park also will be presented with many opportunities that could benefit the park and the region during the same timeframe.



The general management plan will help park managers prepare in advance for the challenges and the anticipated opportunities. The development of the plan itself could help generate opportunities in the future by prompting other agencies and individuals to look ahead and act on neighboring or related issues.

Throughout the GMP process, there will be several opportunities for you to share your concerns and comments with us, whether they relate to issues of challenge or to issues of opportunity. The GMP planning team has identified some preliminary issues that we think may be valuable to consider in this planning effort. Please let us know if you have thoughts or ideas about what should be addressed in this planning process.

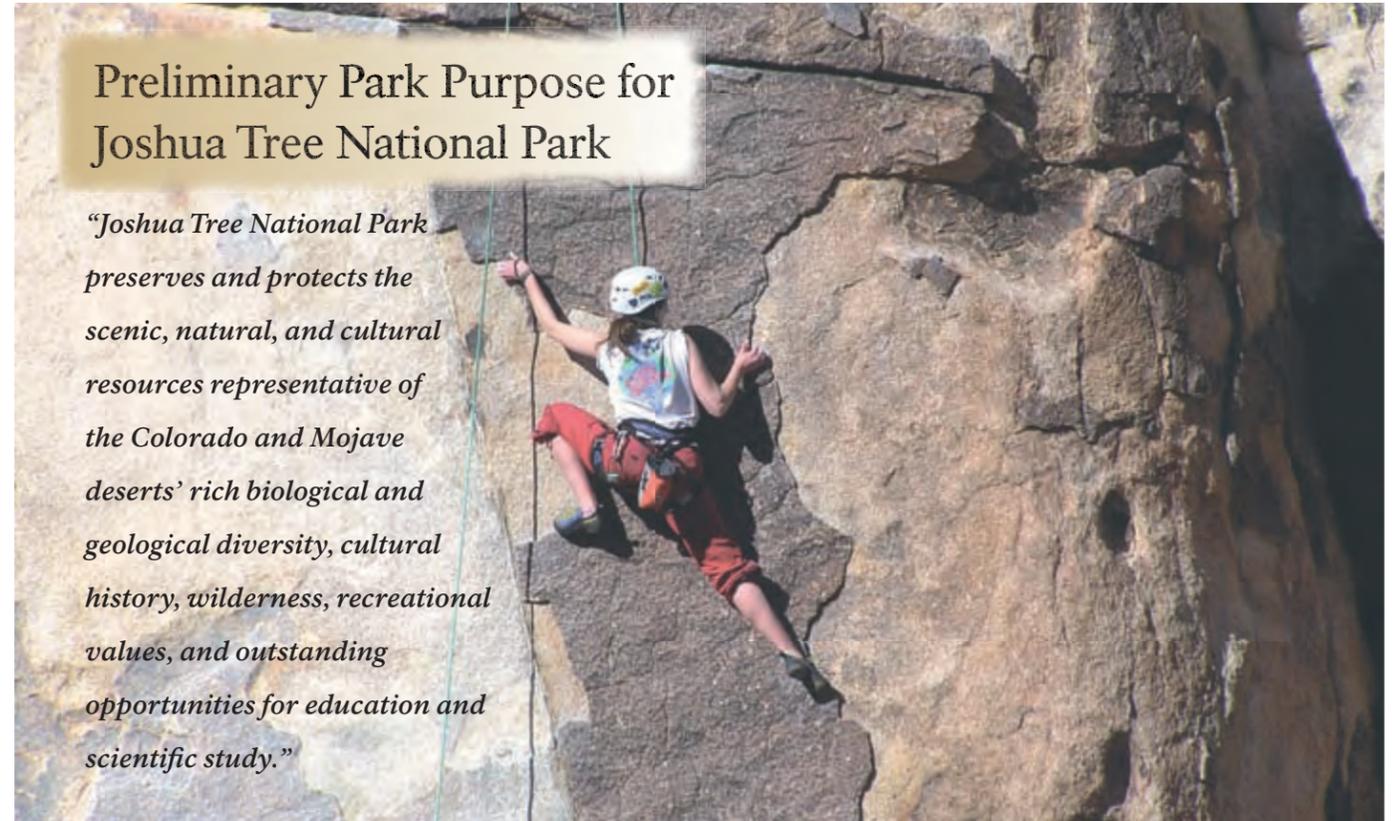
GMP PROCESS PHASE	ESTIMATED DATES	PARK PLANNING TASKS	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES
Foundation Planning	Early 2010	Document why the park was established, what is significant about the park, and what are its most important resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and comment on the statements included in this newsletter</li> </ul>
Public Scoping	Spring & Summer 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit introductory newsletter to public</li> <li>Identify goals and issues that need to be addressed in the planning process</li> <li>Gather public input via open houses, comment cards, and online submittals</li> <li>Review newsletter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review newsletter</li> <li>Submit your concerns and issues via comment cards and NPS planning website</li> <li>Voice your concerns and participate in public meetings</li> </ul>
Alternatives Development	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop preliminary alternatives by outlining different possible futures for the park</li> <li>Determine what actions are needed to accomplish these futures</li> <li>Publish preliminary alternatives in a newsletter to the public</li> <li>Gather public input via open houses, comment cards, and online submittals</li> <li>Revise alternatives based on comments from the public and other stakeholders</li> <li>Develop a preferred alternative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review newsletter</li> <li>Submit your comments on preliminary alternatives via comment cards and NPS website</li> <li>Voice your concerns on preliminary alternatives in public meetings</li> </ul>
Preparation and Distribution of the Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement	2012 - 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare and distribute a draft management plan and environmental impact statement to the public, affected public agencies, and other stakeholders</li> <li>Gather public input via open houses, comment cards, and online submittals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review draft general management plan/environmental impact statement</li> <li>Submit comments on the document via comment cards and NPS website</li> <li>Raise concerns with the draft general management plan/environmental impact statement in public meetings</li> </ul>
Preparation and Approval of a Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement	2014 - 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze comments, respond to comments, and revise the draft general management plan/environmental impact statement accordingly</li> <li>Seek and attain agency approval of the final general management plan and environmental impact statement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the final general management plan/environmental impact statement</li> </ul>
Implementation of the general management plan at the park	2015 and beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin using the plan for guidance and direction on park projects and actions</li> </ul>	



## Joshua Tree National Park

Joshua Tree National Park lies along the east-west transverse ranges of the Little San Bernardino Mountains. The southern boundary of the park follows the base of these mountains along the northern edge of the Coachella Valley; the northern boundary is defined by the Morongo Basin. In terms of ecological uniqueness, Joshua Tree National Park lies at the convergence of two deserts, two large ecosystems whose characteristics are determined primarily by elevation. Below 3,000 feet, the Colorado Desert encompasses the eastern part of the park and features natural gardens of creosote bush, ocotillo, and cholla cactus. The higher, moister, and slightly cooler Mojave Desert is the special habitat of the Joshua tree. In addition to Joshua tree forests, the western part of the park also includes some of the most interesting geologic displays found in California's deserts. The park includes five fan palm oases, which are the few areas where surface water occurs naturally in the park. In addition to many unique natural features and resources, the park lands have a rich and diverse cultural history. Several native cultures have been documented to occupy this area, beginning with the early Pinto culture. Subsequently, European settlement brought a heritage of mining and ranching to these desert lands.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established Joshua Tree National Monument as a unit of the national park system through a Presidential Proclamation on August 10, 1936. After two boundary changes in 1950 and 1961, Congress designated 429,690 acres of the monument as wilderness and 37,550 acres as potential wilderness in 1976. Then, in 1984, the monument was designated as part of a biosphere reserve system that included Joshua Tree and Death Valley national monuments, Anza Borrego Desert State Park, Santa Rosa Mountains Wildlife Management Area, and Deep Canyon Research Center. The last major federal action occurred in 1994, when the Desert Protection Act added 234,000 acres (including 163,000 acres of new wilderness) to the park, and re-designated the area as Joshua Tree National Park.



## Preliminary Park Purpose for Joshua Tree National Park

*“Joshua Tree National Park preserves and protects the scenic, natural, and cultural resources representative of the Colorado and Mojave deserts’ rich biological and geological diversity, cultural history, wilderness, recreational values, and outstanding opportunities for education and scientific study.”*

## Preliminary Significance Statements

- Joshua Tree National Park preserves a world-renowned, undisturbed population of Joshua trees, *Yucca brevifolia brevifolia*, a critical component of the Mojave Desert ecosystem.
- Outstanding examples of Mojave and Colorado desert landscapes that converge at Joshua Tree National Park create a biologically rich system of plant and animal life characterized by iconic Joshua tree woodlands, native palm oases, and vast expanses of creosote scrub that are uniquely adapted to desert conditions. The park also contributes significantly to the connectivity of large protected areas across the California Desert.
- As a component of two intact desert ecosystems, Joshua Tree National Park provides remote yet accessible diverse opportunities to large and burgeoning urban populations.
- Joshua Tree National Park preserves a rich array of prehistoric, historic, and contemporary resources that demonstrate the integral connection between deserts, land use, and human cultures.
- Joshua Tree National Park is situated along one of the world’s most active earthquake faults, the San Andreas Fault. Geologic processes, including tectonic activity, have played and continue to play a major role in shaping the mountains, valleys, and basins of the park.
- Joshua Tree National Park offers unparalleled opportunities for research and scientific investigation of xeric landscapes, arid land ecosystems and processes, evolutionary and ecological adaptations of desert life, and indications of climate change. The proximity of the park to cities and urban regions of southern California and Nevada enhances the value of the park for scientific research.
- Huge, eroded monzogranite boulder formations create a world-renowned landscape that provides unique aesthetic, educational, and recreational opportunities for Joshua Tree National Park visitors.
- Geologic, climatic, and ecological processes create scenic and visual landscape elements unique to deserts and fundamental to the character of Joshua Tree National Park.

## Developing a Foundation for the General Management Plan

The foundation statement is a formal description of a park's core mission. It is a foundation for planning and management of the park. The foundation is grounded in the park's enabling legislation and the understanding of park resources that results from park management activities, research, and civic engagement. The foundation provides a shared understanding of the park's purpose and significance. It also provides an opportunity to integrate and coordinate planning and decisions about park management.



## Foundation Planning Elements

A foundation statement is a tiered document consisting of five elements: park purpose, park significance statements, fundamental resources and values of the park, primary interpretive themes, and special mandates. The park purpose and the park significance statements are the two primary elements, as they help establish a firm base of how the park will be managed and which values will be protected. They also help guide the development of other foundation statement elements such as the interpretive themes and fundamental resources and values. The park purpose and the park significance statements are defined as follows:

- **Park Purpose:** Why did Congress and the President establish the park? The park purpose is derived from the legislative reasoning and federal laws that established the park.
- **Park Significance Statements:** What are the most important assets or values of the park that warrant national park designation? The park significance statements directly support the park purpose.

The following preliminary park purpose and significance statements for Joshua Tree National Park were developed by park staff based on their understanding of the park's resources and history. Please let us know if we have accurately captured what is most significant about Joshua Tree National Park.



The park boundary currently contains 789,745 acres in federal ownership and 20,570 acres of nonfederal lands. Of these lands, 557,802 acres are designated as wilderness. The park lies within both San Bernardino and Riverside counties; it is within 100 miles of the Los Angeles metropolitan area and within a three-hour drive of more than 18 million people. The natural desert expanse of the park provides ideal conditions for campers, photographers, star gazers, and naturalists. The desert offers many lessons for those interested in outdoor learning and nature exploration, or even those solely seeking quiet introspection, reflection, and emotional healing. In addition, the extensive granite rock outcrops, boulder piles, and desert mountain ranges and canyons create a world-class destination for rock climbers, as well as hundreds of miles of scenic trails for hikers and equestrians.

Given the park's location along a transition line between two desert ecosystems, the park is home to a great diversity of desert plants and animals. More than 900 species of flowering plants have been identified in the park, with the most distinctive being the ocotillo, the jumping cholla, and the Joshua tree. The park also preserves more native palm oases than any other park in the national park system. These oases support vegetation and wildlife distinct from other species found in the park. The park contains highly diverse fauna. More than 250 species of birds have been recorded at Joshua Tree National Park, not to mention many unique species of reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and invertebrates. Some examples include the desert tortoise, the California treefrog, the desert bighorn sheep, and a unique species of tarantula that is found only in the Joshua tree plant community.

Joshua Tree National Park protects numerous archeological sites associated with the Pinto Culture, one of the earliest prehistoric cultures found in the California desert (7,000-10,000 years old). In addition, the park preserves sites and material associated with four overlapping ethnographic Native cultures – the Cahuilla, the Serrano, the Chemehuevi, and the Mohave Indians. The park contains historic sites that preserve a complete story of the early history of the processing of gold ore, as well as sites that tell the story of late pioneer cattle ranching, rustling, and homesteading of the western American desert, such as Keys Ranch.

