



Colorado National Monument © NPS

FACT SHEET

National Parks in Colorado

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site • Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park • California National Historic Trail • Colorado National Monument • Curecanti National Recreation Area • Dinosaur National Monument • Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument • Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve • Hovenweep National Monument • Mesa Verde National Park • Old Spanish National Historic Trail • Pony Express National Historic Trail • Rocky Mountain National Park • Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site • Santa Fe National Historic Trail • Yucca House National Monument

From the impressive vistas of the Rocky Mountains to the remains of cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde, Colorado's national parks tell a fascinating tale of our history. The sites are both natural and manmade, highlighting how the people of this region have interacted with their surroundings.

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site - Authorized in 1960. As an Anglo-American outpost on the Southern Plains, the fort was an Indian trading center and a center of civilization on the Santa Fe Trail. Disasters and disease caused the fort's abandonment in 1849. Archaeological excavations and original sketches, paintings and diaries were used in the fort's recon-

struction in 1976.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park - Formed slowly by the action of water and rock scouring down through hard Proterozoic crystalline rock. No other canyon in North America combines the narrow opening, sheer walls, and startling depths offered by the Black Canyon of the Gunnison

California National Historic Trail - Multi-state trail carried over 250,000 gold-seekers and farmers to the gold fields and rich farmlands of California during the 1840s and 1850s.

Colorado National Monument - Proclaimed in 1911. Consists of geologic features including: towering red sandstone monoliths, deep, sheer-walled canyons, and a variety of wildlife (bighorn sheep, golden eagles, mule deer, and mountain lions).

Curecanti National Recreation Area - Designated in 1965. Three reservoirs, named for corresponding dams on the Gunnison River, form the heart of Curecanti National Recreation Area. Panoramic mesas, fjord-like reservoirs, and deep, steep and narrow canyons abound. Recently discovered dinosaur fossils, a 5,000 acre archaeological district, a narrow gauge



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train, and traces of 6,000 year old dwellings further enhance the offerings of Curecanti.

Dinosaur National Monument - Known as Echo Park, it is here that the Yampa River, the last free-flowing river in the Colorado River System, joins the Green River. This is home and critical habitat for the endangered peregrine falcon, bald eagle, Colorado pikeminnow, and razorback sucker. Indian rock art in Echo Park testifies to the allure these canyons and rivers had for prehistoric people.

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument - Authorized in 1969. A beautiful mountain valley just west of Pikes Peak holds spectacular remnants of the earth's prehistoric life. Huge petrified redwoods and incredibly detailed fossils of ancient insects and plants reveal a very different Colorado of long ago. Almost 35 million years ago, enormous volcanic eruptions buried the then-lush valley and petrified the redwood trees that grew there. A lake formed in the valley and the fine-grained sediments at its bottom became the final resting-place for thousands of insects and plants.

Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve - North America's tallest dunes rise 700 feet high against the rugged Sangre de Cristo Mountains. This geologic wonderland, containing 30 square miles of dunes, became a national monument in 1932. Resources now also include alpine lakes and tundra, six peaks over 13,000 feet, ancient spruce and pine forests, large stands of aspen and cottonwood, grasslands, and wetlands.

Hovenweep National Monument - Hovenweep National Monument protects five prehistoric, Puebloan-era villages spread over a 20-mile expanse of mesa tops and canyons along the Utah-Colorado border. Multi-storied towers perched on canyon rims and balanced on boulders lead visitors to marvel at the skill and motivation of their builders.

Mesa Verde National Park - From approximately A.D. 600 through A.D. 1300 people lived and flourished in communities throughout the area, eventually building elaborate stone villages in the sheltered alcoves of the canyon walls. Today these sheltered villages are called "cliff dwellings." The cliff dwellings represent the last 75 to 100 years of occupation at Mesa Verde. In the late 1200s, within the span of one or two generations, the homes were abandoned.

Old Spanish National Historic Trail - Evolved in the early 1800s as a combination of the indigenous footpaths, early trade and exploration routes, and horse and mule routes used by traders between New Mexico and California.

Pony Express National Historic Trail - Between April 1860 and October 1861, this trail was used by young men on fast paced horses to carry the nation's mail across the country, from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California.

Rocky Mountain National Park - Established in 1915. This park exhibits the massive grandeur of the Rocky Mountains. Trail Ridge Road crosses the Continental Divide and looks out over dozens of peaks that tower more than 13,000 feet high. Longs Peak, the highest peak in the park, is 14,259 feet in elevation. The high point on Trail Ridge Road is 12,183 feet. Elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep, moose, coyotes and a great variety of smaller animals call the 416 square miles (265,769 acres) of the national park home.

Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site - Authorized in 2000. On November 29, 1864, Colonel John M. Chivington led approximately 700 U.S. volunteer soldiers to a village of about 500 Cheyenne and Arapaho people camped along the banks of Big Sandy Creek in southeastern Colorado. Although the Cheyenne and Arapaho people believed they were under the protection of the U.S. Army, Chivington's troops attacked and killed about 150 people, mainly women, children, and the elderly.

Santa Fe National Historic Trail - Between 1821 and 1880, the Santa Fe Trail was primarily a commercial highway connecting Missouri and Santa Fe, New Mexico. The trail was also used by stagecoach lines, thousands of gold seekers heading to the California and Colorado gold fields, adventurers, fur trappers, and emigrants. In 1880 the railroad reached Santa Fe and the trail faded into history.

Yucca House National Monument - Proclaimed in 1919. Yucca House National Monument is a large, unexcavated Ancestral Puebloan surface site.

Key Issues Facing National Parks in Colorado

Taking care of America's national parks should be a national priority. With the 100th birthday of the National Park System approaching in 2016, it is more important than ever to address the ongoing problems that our parks are facing. The National Park Service is suffering from an operations funding shortfall now estimated at \$750 million annually. In addition, several billion dollars are needed to protect archaeological sites and historic buildings, and repair the extensive backlog of maintenance projects. Many park friends in Congress have



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spent years highlighting the fiscal crisis in America's national parks. The Administration and Congress responded in fiscal year 2008 with a \$122 million increase in the budget for park operations. This is a strong first step in our parks and improving the experiences of visitors. The FY 2008 budget also launched the National Park Centennial Challenge, which will help restore the parks for their 100th birthday and for generations to come. In addition to the operational shortfall, the National Park Service has a \$1.9 billion land acquisition backlog consisting of over 11,000 tracts of land and covering more than 1.8 million acres. In many instances, failure to acquire these lands makes operating the parks more complex and costly. Unfortunately, funding for national park federal land acquisition has declined dramatically in recent years, from \$130 million five years ago, to only \$21 million in the fiscal year 2009 request.

- With increased funding, Mesa Verde could provide conservation and restoration to 5,000 cultural sites, thereby allowing for more backcountry access to the more deteriorated sites that are now closed to the public.
- Subsequent to the fires at Mesa Verde, there has been a huge issue with invasive species overrunning the park's natural ecosystem. With a limited staff, the park struggles to manage this challenge, and cannot yet restore bighorn sheep to the park.
- Rocky Mountain also requires increased law enforcement staff to protect archaeological sites from vandals and looters.

ers. Current staffing levels are not sufficient both to protect park resources and maintain quality visitor services. The number of full-time equivalent positions has not risen in proportion to the rate of increased visitation.

- In 2006, Dinosaur National Monument was forced to close the Quarry Visitor Center because unstable soil threatened to cause the entire building to collapse. Building a new visitor center is on hold until additional funding is appropriated.

Park Visitation in Colorado

In 2006, the national parks in Colorado welcomed 5.3 million visitors.

Budget Information

In fiscal year 2008, the operations funding for the national parks in Colorado is \$33.8 million. For fiscal year 2009, the Administration is proposing a 7 percent increase, which would bring operations funding to \$36.2 million.

Contact Information

For more information on the national parks in Colorado, please contact NPCA Regional Director David Nimkin at 801-521-0785 or NPCA Legislative Director Blake Selzer at 202-223-6722, ext. 250.

NPS Unit	FY03 Enacted	FY04 Enacted	FY05 Enacted	FY06 Enacted	FY07 Enacted	FY08 Enacted	FY 09 Requested	% Change FY07-08	% Change FY08-09	
Dinosaur National Monument	\$2,786	\$2,777	\$2,865	\$2,864	\$2,932	\$3,257	\$3,656	11	12	
Hovenweep National Monument	\$497	\$493	\$506	\$510	\$517	\$536	\$548	4	2	
Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP	\$1,028	\$1,024	\$1,063	\$1,074	\$1,099	\$1,531	\$1,658	39	8	
Colorado NM	\$962	\$958	\$1,115	\$1,138	\$1,165	\$1,489	\$1,579	28	6	
Sand Creek Massacre NHS	\$291	\$287	\$356	\$462	\$653	\$654	\$851	0	30	
Curecanti NRA	\$2,970	\$2,955	\$3,041	\$3,120	\$3,194	\$3,733	\$3,918	17	5	
Mesa Verde NP	\$4,858	\$5,024	\$5,151	\$5,307	\$5,476	\$6,080	\$6,627	11	9	
Florissant Fossil Beds NM	\$632	\$630	\$768	\$784	\$799	\$905	\$921	13	2	
Rocky Mountain NP (& Cache La Poudre HA)	\$10,351	\$10,337	\$10,698	\$10,952	\$11,301	\$12,181	\$12,877	8	6	
Great Sand Dunes NP & Preserve	\$1,455	\$1,448	\$1,731	\$2,049	\$2,088	\$2,231	\$2,326	7	4	
Bent's Old Fort NHS	\$1,003	\$999	\$1,052	\$1,076	\$1,099	\$1,143	\$1,163	4	2	
Yucca House NM	\$99	\$97	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$103	0	3	
All Colorado Parks						\$30,423	\$33,840	\$36,227	11%	7%

All dollar amounts in thousands

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