

Florissant Fossil Beds Geoheritage

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Florissant Fossil Beds
National Monument
Colorado



Geoheritage refers to our geologic heritage and encompasses significant geologic features, landforms, and landscapes which are preserved for the full range of values that society places on them, including scientific, aesthetic, cultural, economic, educational, recreational, and tourism. Such sites provide for scientific studies, outdoor education, and public enjoyment. They help us understand geologic processes, the history of life, climatic changes over time, and evolution of landforms. Geoheritage sites are conserved as an ongoing legacy of their lessons and beauty into the future.

Changing Values through Time

Over past generations, people have used and valued Florissant's geoheritage in different ways, leaving a rich legacy for us to consider today as we strive to protect the site into the future. Geoheritage begins with the history of the Earth recorded in rocks, fossils, and landscapes. Humanity has a long and interconnected relationship with these geologic features. Florissant's history shows the convergence of many societal

and cultural values around a single location. People's perspectives toward this landscape have changed over time and their values for land use vary still today. The geological features have sustained human livelihoods, shaped historical events, provided economic benefits, enticed scientists to discover new knowledge, captivated artists, and provided a landscape where people can simply sit and ponder.

The Arc of Heritage A Rainbow of Human Connections

Tribal

Ancient ancestors of Tribal people lived in this landscape and made use of its resources as long as 8,000 years ago.

Economic Uses

Historic economic values supported lumbering, mining, ranching, and fossil-selling on this landscape.

Scientific Discovery

Early scientific explorers realized this area's unique value for understanding the Earth and its history.

Protection

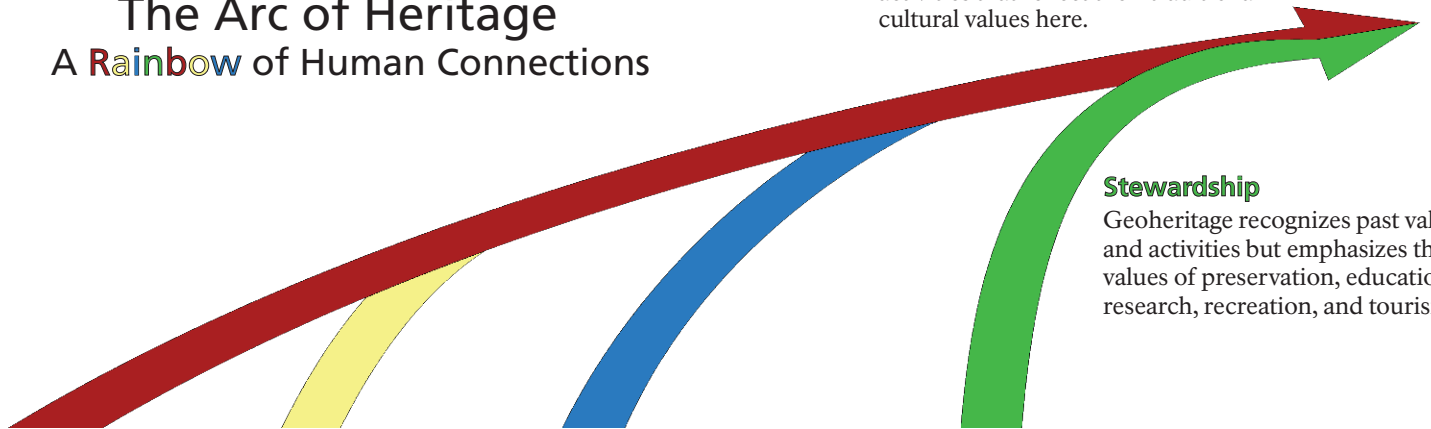
In 1969, this area was protected as a national monument by the actions of concerned local residents, scientists, lawyers, and politicians.

Tribal

Tribes maintain their connection to this landscape today and continue activities that reflect their traditional cultural values here.

Stewardship

Geoheritage recognizes past values and activities but emphasizes the values of preservation, education, research, recreation, and tourism.



Tribal people traditionally used the geologic landscape for their subsistence. They found food and medicinal plants and used rocks to make tools. Artifacts from Florissant show evidence of human presence 8,000 years ago. Modern tribal descendants of these peoples still share the same connection to the land as their ancestors.



Early settlers and homesteaders arrived in the 1870s and used the land for their economic livelihood. Some felt a connection to the fossils and made some of the earliest discoveries.



Scientific expeditions to the American West began during the 1860s and 1870s. These explorers brought Florissant to world attention as hundreds of new fossil species were described, inspiring people to realize the rich geologic heritage here.

Scientists studied Florissant and built careers around their discoveries here. Their work created the heritage of scientific knowledge that helps us understand why Florissant is so important. This heritage has been recorded by more than 150 scientists who have described nearly 2,000 fossil species in more than 320 publications over 150 years!



The New Petrified Forest



Entrepreneur landowners realized economic benefits by developing tourist attractions where people could enjoy the large, petrified redwood stumps and collect fossils. Two commercial petrified forests operated here for several decades. Other landowners wanted to develop their properties into real estate subdivisions, posing a threat of destruction to the fossil beds.

Environmental activists, lawyers, and politicians were among the first to realize that Florissant's important fossil resources held societal values for the nation's geoh heritage and needed to be protected to provide stewardship and ongoing scientific research. They acted to prevent the destruction of the fossil beds and helped to establish Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument in 1969, setting landmark precedents in environmental law.



Visitors, tourists, and recreationists come to Florissant today and can find their own connections and experiences in Florissant's geoh heritage. What does this place mean to you as you see giant petrified redwood trees and walk along trails leading through Earth's geologic past?

