



Design Development

Since the project kick-off in 2019, a diverse group of subject-matter experts and stakeholders—from tribal communities, academia, and the National Park Service, have been engaged in re-imagining exhibits for the park’s museum—one of the oldest in the National Park System.

As part of this process, a Native Interpretation Working Group (NIWG) was established in 2020. The NIWG devoted countless hours to content development and is actively involved in the design process. Co-creation of exhibits with Tribal partners allows us to effectively interpret the connections of present-day communities to the sacred lands and Ancestral sites protected in the park.

The project is entering the Design Development phase where topics and information from the content



Members of the NIWG visit park collections with park curator, Dr. Tara Travis, as part of the Schematic Design II review in 2022

development process will be merged with the overall framework “Rooted in the Landscape” that was developed in the Schematic Design phase. The resulting “narrative arc” or storyline will organize the content into a logical flow through the exhibit galleries.

The Design Development I submittal will be available for comments later this summer. The project is funded through final design and we are hoping to receive funding for exhibit fabrication in 2024.



In the preferred alternative “Rooted in the Landscape” (shown in this preliminary sketch from Schematic Design II) each large gallery will focus on a feature of the Mesa Verde landscape (mesa tops, alcoves, and canyons). Immersive experiences will allow visitors to learn about the park in different seasons and understand how relationships with this place have shaped diverse groups over time—tribal communities, archeologists and other scientists, as well as park visitors.

New Park Film

Mesa Verde’s new film, “Footprints of Our Ancestors” is being shown in the park’s museum. The museum recently re-opened and temporary exhibits will be installed throughout the summer.

The film focuses on contemporary Pueblos’ and Tribes’ connections to Mesa Verde. It is also available on the park’s website at <https://www.nps.gov/meve/learn/footprints-of-our-ancestors.htm>

This film was made possible by the Mesa Verde Foundation and the Colorado State Historical Fund, with supplemental funding provided by the Mesa Verde Association.



National Priorities



The museum has served visitors for 100 years—but original exhibits did not include tribal perspectives, were not accessible, and have become outdated. Telling an inclusive story and improving accessibility will enrich the experience of hundreds of thousands of park visitors, and help them better appreciate the park’s significance.

The National Park Service is striving to be more inclusive and represent communities that haven’t always had a voice in telling their stories.



Co-creating exhibits with Tribal partners is an important part of achieving these goals. Chuck Sams, the first Native Director of the National Park Service has identified the following priorities:



National Park Service Director Chuck Sams

- To advance equity, inclusion, and access in carrying out the NPS mission.
- To respect and strengthen Indigenous connections, enhance our nation-to-nation relationships, and fully uphold our trust and treaty relationships.
- To create an NPS experience that meets visitor expectations into the future.

Ensuring diverse perspectives of 26 associated Pueblos and Tribes are represented in the new exhibits is a challenge that requires approaching exhibit design in a new way—but we are confident that the results will be well worth the effort.

New ramps have been installed in three of the museum galleries and two more are planned. This will make all exhibit galleries accessible for visitors who use wheelchairs. The new exhibits will also be designed to appeal to multiple learning styles.

Introducing Cecilia Shields



Mesa Verde is proud to welcome Cecilia Shields, Picuris, Okay Owingeh and Mescalero Apache, as a new Supervisory Park Ranger on the Interpretation and Visitor Services team.

Previously, Cecilia served as the Tribal Interpreter for Picuris Pueblo, and worked for the NPS at Bandelier and the Flagstaff Area National Monuments.

In addition to her other duties, Cecilia will be part of the design team for the new exhibits.

