



# Foundation Document Overview

## Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Ohio



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### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*The purpose of CUYAHOGA VALLEY NATIONAL PARK is to preserve and protect for public use and enjoyment the historic, scenic, natural, and recreational values of the Cuyahoga River and its valley; to maintain the necessary recreational open space in connection with the urban environment; and to provide for the recreational and educational needs of the visiting public.*

## Significance

Significance statements express why Cuyahoga Valley National Park 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.

- Cuyahoga Valley National Park is an island of high ecological integrity within a densely populated urban region. Situated along a major river system at the southern edge of Lake Erie, and bordering the edge of Ice Age glaciation between the Appalachian Mountains and the Great Plains, the park's location supports a high biological diversity and provides a vital habitat corridor for migrating species.
- Rooted in national environmental and social movements of the 20th century, the establishment of the park was a community-driven response to urban sprawl and ecological abuses epitomized by fires on the Cuyahoga River. The park continues to lead in restoring degraded landscapes, perpetuating environmental awareness, and promoting the ethic of stewardship and sustainability.
- Resources in the Cuyahoga Valley illustrate a continuum of transportation corridors from early American Indian to modern times. Of national significance, the Ohio & Erie Canal was part of the first interstate transportation system in lands known as the U.S. interior to the East Coast. This opened up the entire region for industrialization and contributed to the growth of the economy at a critical time in U.S. history.
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park protects a large and diverse collection of cultural resources in the Midwestern United States, consisting of more than 600 examples of historic structures, cultural landscapes, and archeological sites. This exceptional assemblage conveys themes that include American Indian and later settlement, transportation, agriculture, industry, and recreation.
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park came into being in 1974 as a unified patchwork of land ownership sewn together by an unprecedented grassroots effort of community partners. As an outgrowth of this partnership origin, the park has become an innovator and a national leader in shared stewardship models through its dynamic community engagement, nationally recognized partnerships, and one of the largest volunteer programs in the country.
- Located within a one-hour drive of over three million people, Cuyahoga Valley National Park offers in-depth, active, and innovative education and recreation opportunities that can provide a first national park experience to a large urban audience. These experiences are exemplified by a large community-connected trail system, a residential environmental education center, a scenic railroad, and a network of sustainable farms.

## Fundamental Resources and Values

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.

- **Cuyahoga River Ecosystem**
- **Forest Ecosystem**
- **Ohio & Erie Canal**
- **Valley Railway**
- **Agricultural Resources and Rural Landscape**
- **Virginia Kendall State Park Historic District**
- **Trail, Water, and Rail Network**
- **Place-based Education**
- **Community Engagement**

## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park— they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from — and should reflect — park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Parks to the People** – In keeping with Cuyahoga Valley’s long history as a place for retreat from urban areas, Cuyahoga Valley National Park is the product of a national movement for the establishment of parks for use by people living in an urban environment. Grassroots efforts helped to create this national park and continue to support it through stewardship and advocacy. The park is valuable for discovery, exploration, and recreation that renews mind, body, and spirit in a rural setting often unavailable to urban residents.

- **Park as a Classroom** – The diverse array of natural and cultural resources in the Cuyahoga Valley offers opportunities for learning, discovery, and revelation. Lessons of conflict, adaptability, ingenuity, and interdependence illustrate broader trends in many disciplines, including sustainability, ecology, agriculture, and U.S. history.
- **Cultural and Natural Interplay** – The wide variety and wealth of natural and cultural resources in Cuyahoga Valley National Park exist singly, but also meld into a mosaic of pastoral landscapes that were created and continue to be transformed by the interplay of geologic, ecological, and cultural forces. Understanding human interaction with the valley environment from American Indian to present times can serve to inspire and encourage discussion of land stewardship.
- **Watershed Connections** – The Cuyahoga River connects Cuyahoga Valley National Park with the Great Lakes, the largest system of fresh water in the world. This “river that burned” gave international attention to water quality issues and encouraged action through the passage of environmental legislation, especially the Clean Water Act. Understanding the watershed connections demonstrates the potentially far-reaching impacts of land preservation, community engagement, and individual daily decisions on environmental health.
- **Natural Diversity** – Cuyahoga Valley National Park provides refuge for a surprisingly rich natural diversity of plants and animals, including rare, threatened, and endangered species whose survival depends on park protection. This unique species composition is a result of the park’s location in a transition zone between major regions of the country, combined with its glacial history and varied topography.
- **Evolution of Transportation** – Representative of national trends in transportation, people used the Cuyahoga Valley as a transportation corridor from pre-contact to modern times, taking advantage of its topography while overcoming its obstacles. Through changing transportation technologies, people have sought opportunities for economic growth, recreation, freedom, and communication with the outside world. Evolving transportation systems continue to impact daily lives.
- **Impact of the Canal** – As a critical link in the 19th century transportation infrastructure, the Ohio & Erie Canal was among the most successful of America’s canals during the period canals contributed to the growth of the nation. By connecting regions, it contributed to the development of a national market economy while stimulating community growth locally, regionally, and nationally.

# Description

Cuyahoga Valley National Park encompasses 33,000 acres along the Cuyahoga River between Cleveland and Akron, Ohio. Its setting in a metropolitan area and its combination of scenic, natural, historic, recreational, and education values make it a well-loved gem in the national park system. Established by Congress on December 27, 1974, as Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, the area was renamed Cuyahoga Valley National Park in 2000.

The Cuyahoga River drains into Lake Erie, part of the Great Lakes ecosystem. Some of the largest remaining forest tracts in northeast Ohio, stunning exposed rock ledges, and waterfalls contribute to the park's natural scenery. Its natural

habitat provides a refuge for an assortment of plants and wildlife including rare, threatened, and endangered species.

The valley's human story began when the modern landscapes began to evolve after glaciation, and American Indian peoples left their mark through archeological sites and earthworks. Today, the park contains hundreds of cultural assets, including the Ohio & Erie Canal, the Valley Railway, and historic communities and farms.

Visitors have numerous opportunities to enjoy the park. Park staff work closely with partners to provide educational and cultural programs, arts and crafts demonstrations, recreational and ranger-guided programs, and other special events. Recreational activities are available year-round and include hiking, excursion rail tours, fishing, running, bicycling, horseback riding, golfing, skiing, sightseeing and picnicking, bird-watching, and nature study.

The park's open space is vast for a metropolitan setting, contributing to the quality of life within the region while protecting the resources within its boundaries.

