



Foundation Document Overview

Theodore Roosevelt National Park

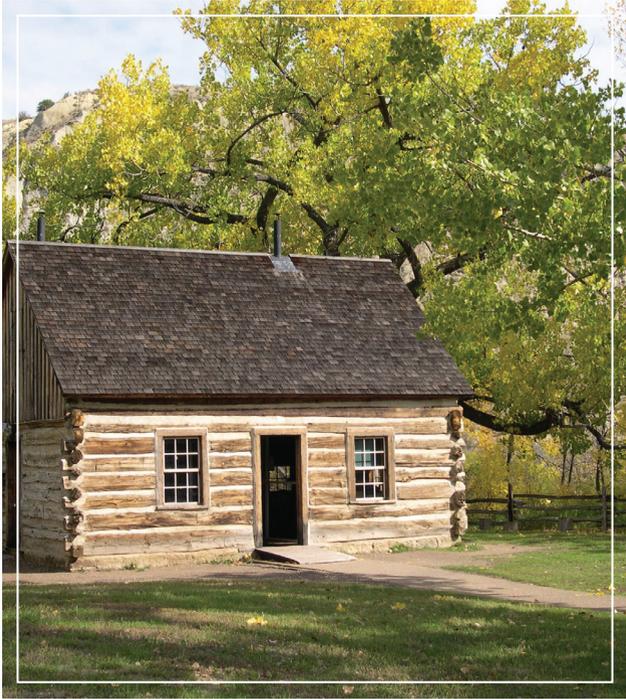
North Dakota



Contact Information

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Purpose



THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL PARK memorializes Theodore Roosevelt and pays tribute to his enduring contribution to the conservation of our nation's resources by preserving and protecting the scenery, wildlife, and wilderness qualities of the North Dakota Badlands—the landscape that inspired Roosevelt and still inspires visitors today.



Significance

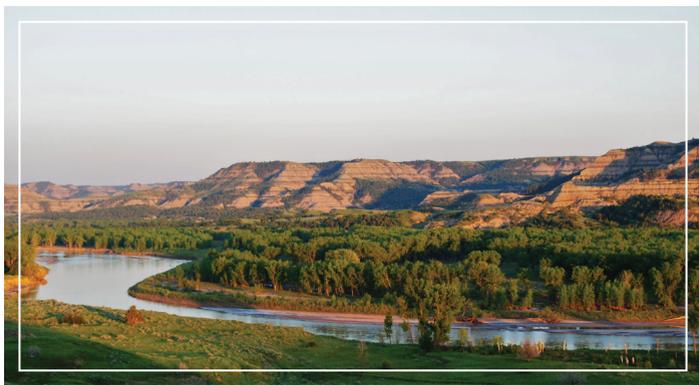
Significance statements express why Theodore Roosevelt National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked 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.

- Theodore Roosevelt National Park's Little Missouri River Badlands, a rugged landscape of colorful geological formations, varied habitats, and abundant wildlife, provide a strikingly dramatic contrast with the rolling mixed-grass prairies in the surrounding region.
- Within the park, continuous erosion exposes 65 million years of the earth's past, dramatically illustrated by clearly visible geological strata, a variety of fossils, and the third largest concentration of petrified wood in the national park system.
- Theodore Roosevelt National Park preserves the landscape that inspired Theodore Roosevelt to adopt a conservation ethic. As president, he set aside more than 230 million acres of public land for future generations.
- Theodore Roosevelt National Park preserves the site of the Elkhorn Ranch, Roosevelt's second ranch in the Dakota Badlands, and provides visitors with an exceptional opportunity to immerse themselves in the same setting where Roosevelt lived, worked, and wrote.
- Theodore Roosevelt National Park provides an unparalleled opportunity to observe bison, bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, coyotes, prairie dogs, and other native animals in their natural habitat.
- Theodore Roosevelt National Park's night skies, clean air, and wilderness qualities offer exceptional beauty, silence, and solitude, which encourage personal growth, inspiration, and healing, just as they did for Theodore Roosevelt in the 1880s.
- In the midst of continuing significant energy development in western North Dakota, Theodore Roosevelt National Park retains a high degree of resource integrity and is an unspoiled example of the Little Missouri River Badlands.

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.

- **Native Wildlife and Habitat.**
- **Little Missouri River.**
- **Outstanding Geologic and Paleontological Resources, Including the Petrified Forest.**
- **Scenic Views and Clean Air.**
- **The Theodore Roosevelt Wilderness and Wilderness Qualities Throughout the Park.**
- **The Elkhorn Ranch.**
- **The Maltese Cross Cabin and Roosevelt-related Museum Collections.**



Theodore Roosevelt National Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Peaceful Valley Ranch.**
- **Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration Structures.**
- **Archeological and Ethnographic Resources.**
- **Feral Horses.**

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.

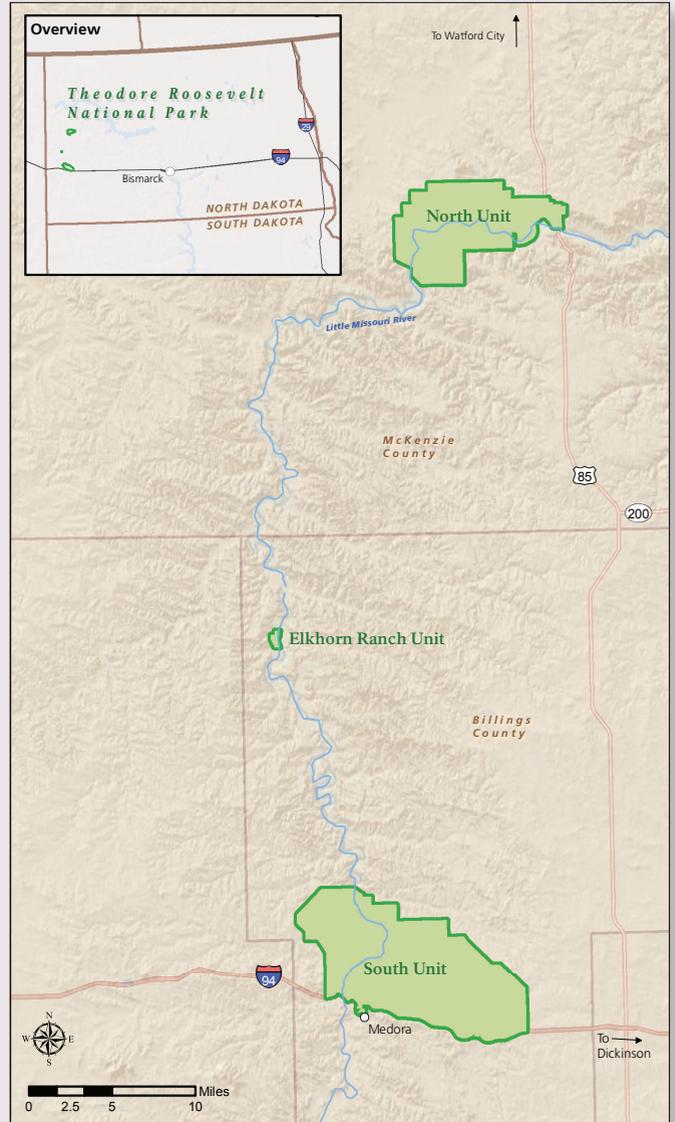
- Theodore Roosevelt’s experiences in the Little Missouri Badlands inspired in him a strong conservation ethic, leading him to use his political power and influence to initiate national policies regarding natural resource protection and stewardship that continue to benefit us today.
- The dramatic, dissected landforms and spectacular vistas of Theodore Roosevelt National Park allow visitors to experience the continuous processes of erosion that have created the rugged landscape of the Little Missouri Badlands.
- Theodore Roosevelt National Park’s array of Northern Great Plains wildlife invites reflection on the interconnectedness of all living beings, the importance of diversity and healthy ecosystems, and the value of conserving wildlife to uplift and inspire humanity.
- The spectacular vistas, natural beauty, clear air, and dark night skies of Theodore Roosevelt National Park provide opportunities for solitude, exploration, inspiration, reflection, and spiritual renewal that can fulfill the human need for self-discovery through connection to the land.
- The congressionally designated Theodore Roosevelt Wilderness at Theodore Roosevelt National Park allows visitors to experience large areas of land with no “permanent improvements or human habitation”—a remnant of the wild and rugged land Theodore Roosevelt found so compelling.
- American Indian interaction with the Little Missouri Badlands reveals the cultural significance of the land through both ceremony and tradition.
- The stories of the people who traveled through or lived in the Little Missouri Badlands serve as powerful reminders of the human drive to survive and thrive in challenging environments.

Description

Theodore Roosevelt National Park comprises 70,447 acres of land in three separate units: the South Unit, the North Unit, and the Elkhorn Ranch Unit in Billings and McKenzie counties in North Dakota. The park was established in 1947 as Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park (South Unit and Elkhorn Ranch Unit), to honor the memory of Theodore Roosevelt. The North Unit was added in 1948. In 1978 Congress redesignated the area as Theodore Roosevelt National Park and also established the 29,920-acre Theodore Roosevelt Wilderness within the park's North Unit and South Unit.

This national park preserves a landscape of striking contrasts—the North Dakota Badlands (also referred to as the Little Missouri River Badlands), which had a profound effect on Theodore Roosevelt. Here, the mixed grass prairies of the Northern Great Plains give way to fantastically broken terrain. Roosevelt first came to the North Dakota Badlands in September 1883 to hunt one of the few remaining bison. While in the area, he bought into a partnership at the Maltese Cross Ranch, and thus entered the cattle business. Roosevelt returned to New York after the hunting trip, but a few months later, on February 14, 1884, he experienced great personal tragedy when his wife and mother died on the same day. Seized by intense grief, Roosevelt thereupon decided to return to the Badlands to lead “the strenuous life” of a cattle rancher. He sought repose, solitude, and mental rejuvenation, and found all three during his time living at the Elkhorn Ranch, which is now the most historically significant portion of the park.

The time Theodore Roosevelt spent living in the North Dakota Badlands ultimately inspired his conservation ethic, and he directly attributed his ascendance to the presidency to his experiences in this area. During his tenure as the 26th U.S. president, Roosevelt set aside 230 million acres of public land for national parks, forests, monuments, and wildlife refuges, thus earning him the nickname, “the Conservationist President.”



The South Unit of the park is just north of Medora, North Dakota. The Little Missouri River runs through the western half of the unit. Most of the land west of the river falls into the Theodore Roosevelt Wilderness, including the Petrified Forest, which contains the third-largest concentration of petrified wood within the national park system. The 218-acre Elkhorn Ranch Unit is approximately 35 miles north of Medora and is accessed via unpaved roads. The unit includes the site of Theodore Roosevelt’s second ranch in the Badlands (the Elkhorn Ranch), which was the center of his cattle ranching operations. The North Unit is 15 miles south of Watford City, North Dakota, and is accessed via U.S. Highway 85. Almost the entire land area in the North Unit is composed of the Theodore Roosevelt Wilderness, except for a narrow corridor alongside the unit’s 14-mile scenic drive.