

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK PRIMARY AND SECONDARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

PRIMARY THEME

The geologic features of Glacier National Park combine natural beauty, examples of mountain-building, and the effects of glaciation, revealing many chapters in the history of the Earth.

Sub-themes

The geology of Glacier National Park provides a snapshot of the tremendous forces of geologic uplift, mountain building, and over-thrust events that provided the unique foundation for Glacier’s natural beauty.

The Rocky Mountain range narrows in northern Montana to provide wildlife, human, and vegetative convergence un-like most places on earth.

The ice ages of the recent past have carved classic glacial features that give insight into the beauty, power, and timelessness of the tremendous forces that shape the earth.

Glacier has one of the finest assemblage of ice-age alpine glacial features in the contiguous 48 states, and it has relatively accessible, small-scale active glaciers

Glacier is at an apex of the continent and one of the few places in the world that has a triple divide. Water flows to the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans.

Related Topics

Airshed	Glaciation	Overthrust fault
Animal life	Glaciers	Plate tectonics
Changing climates	Geomorphology	Rocks
Deposition	Habitat diversity	Sedimentary
Erosion	Igneous intrusions	Soundscape
Evolution	Landscape, (hist. designed)	Stromatolites
Exposed rock	Lavas – sills	Triple Divide
Fault lines	Metamorphic	Uplift
Fossils	Minerals	Vegetation
Fire effects	Mountain building	Viewshed
Geologic specimens	Natural processes	Watershed
Geologic time	Night sky	Weather patterns

PRIMARY THEME

Glacier National Park offers a variety of wilderness experiences that provide the challenges and rewards of encountering nature on its own terms while conveying the necessity of stewardship for the land.

Sub-themes

The Going-to-the-Sun Road, one of the most scenic roads in North America, is a National Historic Landmark, and provides easy access to views of and entry points to experience wilderness.

Glacier’s wilderness offers opportunities for physical and mental challenge, risk and reward, renewal, self-reliance, solitude, inspiration, artistic expression, pride springing from a shared heritage, and the prospect of hope for the future.

The wilderness concept, codified into law, originated in the United States with the conviction that some wild land resources are most valuable to Americans if left in their natural state.

As a foundation for healthy and diverse ecosystems, officially designated wilderness and other remaining wild lands like Glacier National Park provide critical habitat for rare and endangered species and play a significant role in the overall health of natural systems worldwide.

Much of Glacier National Park is eligible for designation as a wilderness, and therefore is managed differently than other federal lands in order to retain its primeval character and preserve it as a special place for humans to examine their relationship to the natural world.

The designated wilderness of Glacier National Park offers opportunities for personal renewal. Glacier’s wilderness contains primitive areas relatively undisturbed by human activities where scientific research may reveal information about natural processes and living systems that may have wide-ranging applications as global indicators of ecological change.

Cultural and archeological sites found in Glacier National Park wilderness can provide a more complete picture of human history and culture when treated with sensitivity and respect.

Wilderness visitors must accept certain inherent risks associated with weather, terrain, water, wildlife, and other natural elements; visitor safety cannot be guaranteed, but can be enhanced with proper trip planning, appropriate skill, and responsible behavior.

Related Topics

Accessibility	Landscape unchanged	Solitude
Accessible trailheads	Leave No Trace	Soundscape
Air quality	Life zones	Strata – geologic/biologic
Definitions	Lodging facilities	Traditional travel routes
Discovery	Management/admin.processes	Unique road experience
Ethnography	Natural processes	Variety of experience options
Exploration	Recreation	Vast, remote wilderness
Historic camps	Risk, hazard and challenge	Watersheds
Historic structures	Shared heritage	Wilderness skills
Historic travel routes	Society	Wildlife

PRIMARY THEME

Glacier National Park’s designation as part of the world’s first International Peace Park celebrates on-going peace, cooperation, and goodwill between two nations, and symbolizes the ideal of peace between all nations.

Sub-themes

The peace park commemorates lasting peace between Canada and the United States.

The Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage designations highlight the importance of this area to the world.

The Peace Park concept, born at Waterton-Glacier IPP in 1932, has evolved and contributed to the international community in a variety of ways and served many positive conservation causes.

International tensions of contemporary times reveal the importance of cooperation and collaboration as reflected through the window of the International Peace Park

Differences between cultures and countries can be reconciled and replaced with trust and friendship.

People of the world can be inspired by the cooperative management of natural and cultural resources that is shared by Canada and the United States.

Glacier National Park and Waterton Lakes National Park offer an opportunity for both countries to cooperate peacefully to resolve controversial natural resource issues that transcend international boundaries.

Related Topics

Borders	Goodwill / friendship	Shared natural systems
Boundary cut	Homeland security	Similarities / differences
Canadian flag	“International” boat	Trans-boundary parks
Cooperation	Management policies	Trust between differing cultures
Collaboration - Interpretation	Railroad history and role	Unguarded borders
Collaboration - Protection	Role model status	View looking “In”
Collaboration-Resource Mgmt	Rotary International Club	Visitor accommodations
First Nations	Shared human history	World peace

PRIMARY THEME

Glacier’s cultural resources chronicle the evolving history of human activities, interactions, and experiences in the American west that reveal changes in societal attitudes about land and its uses.

Sub-themes

The park’s roads, chalets, and hotels symbolize early 20th century western park experiences. Many of these historic structures are still in use today.

The majestic landscape has a spiritual value for all human beings – a place to nurture, replenish, and restore themselves.

The Great Northern Railroad opened western Montana to many people who otherwise could not

have reached its remoteness. This hastened the development of Glacier National Park, and blazed a trail for a variety of human uses of the landscape.

Land-use values have evolved since the first nations settled in northwest Montana, creating wide-ranging pressures between interests, and resulting in conflicts, and compromise in a microcosm of the American west.

In Glacier National Park concession companies created to support national park development have contributed to the historic landscape through construction and maintenance of buildings displaying classic western national park architecture; these elements of the park are both an attraction and a challenge to preserve.

Migration and settlement patterns of original people and westward-bound settlers resulted in a patchwork through the years that contributes to the fabric of Montana culture and gives rise to contemporary questions affecting conservation of natural and cultural resources.

Fire, a natural part of all forest communities, poses a particular challenge to park managers, whose goal is to maintain natural systems while protecting humans and the built environment.

Going-to-the-Sun Road, both a National Historic Landmark and a National Engineering Landmark, represents an early breakthrough in the approach to park management that encouraged visitor use of a spectacular national park; it also poses one of the most complex structural preservation and maintenance challenges in the National Park System.

Related topics

Archeology	Contemp. land uses and values	Homesteading
Art/humanity	Cultural resource threats	Migration
Built environments	Fire	Mining and oil
Car/backcountry camp and use	Fire-use fires	Native Americans
Changing land use	Going-to-the-Sun Road	Partners
Collaboration	Great Northern Railway	Prescribed fire
Concession companies	Historic structures	Survival
Conflict	Historic tours	Transportation
		Westward expansion

PRIMARY THEME

The enduring connection between the Blackfeet, Salish, and Kootenai peoples and the landscape and resources of the area known as Glacier National Park is reflected through their history, traditions, language, and contemporary values.

Sub-themes

The area called Glacier National Park represents a place of special significance to many cultural elements of the Blackfeet, Kootenai, and Salish peoples; it is a spiritual touchstone that helps continue the traditions and values that have been in place for generations.

Changes in land use patterns triggered by the westward expansion of the United States forced American Indian peoples in the area to react and adapt to outside pressures to maintain their lifestyles and traditions.

Contemporary American Indian communities include places in Glacier National Park as elements of their societal fabric and cultural priorities.

American Indians had a strong spiritual connection with the area long before its designation as a national park. From prehistoric times to the present, American Indians have identified places in the area as important to their heritage.

The majestic landscape has a spiritual value for all human beings – a place to nurture, replenish, and restore themselves.

Related Topics

American Indian lifeways Archeology - historic/prehistoric Art/Humanity- history/perception Bordering nations Change Cultural similarities/differences Cultural resources Ethnographic uses Going-to-the-Sun Road Historic tours	Home Homesteading Mining Native American contemporary values and traditional uses Oral history- scientific/mythic Parkitecture Place names Private property Sacred lands	Sacred sites Spiritual-all cultures Temporal consideration Traditional rights and interests Subsistence Traditional values Transportation– stage/boat/ horse/rail Vision quests
--	---	--

PRIMARY THEME

The establishment of Glacier National Park and its geographic location have enabled its ecological processes and biological diversity to survive relatively intact in a rapidly changing and encroaching world.

Sub-themes

Due to wide variations in elevation, climate, and soil, five distinct vegetation zones overlap in Glacier and have produced strikingly diverse habitats that sustain plant and animal populations, including threatened and endangered, rare, and sensitive species.

Glacier is one of the few places in the contiguous 48 states that continue to support natural populations of all indigenous carnivores and most of their prey.

Glacier provides an outstanding opportunity for ecological management and research in one of the largest areas where natural processes predominate. As a result, the park has been designated a Biosphere Reserve, and Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park has been designated as a

World Heritage site.

Related Topics

Backbone of the World	Ecosystem diversity	Nyack flood plain
Biological diversity	Faunal remnants	Missing elements of ecosystem
Carnivores	Fire	Predator/prey relationships
Climate change	Floristic provinces	Scarcity of exotics
Connectivity - wildlife corridor	Genetic pool	Triple divide
Continuity of studies	Geologic impact on flora/fauna	Untrammeled ecosystem
Convergence—floral and faunal	Global research data	Vegetative zones
“Crown of the Continent”	Migration	Wilderness
DNA studies	Nearly intact ecosystem	Y2