



Foundation Document Overview

Blue Ridge Parkway

North Carolina / Virginia



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of the BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY is to connect Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks via a scenic parkway, with areas for recreation, through the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia and North Carolina, and to preserve natural and cultural resources while providing opportunities for public enjoyment.



Significance

Significance statements express why Blue Ridge Parkway 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.

1. The Blue Ridge Parkway was the first national rural parkway to be conceived, designed, and constructed for a leisurely driving experience that included opportunities for resource-based recreation. The parkway is internationally recognized in textbooks and literature for its landscape and engineering design achievements as a rural parkway that lies lightly on the land and blends into the landscape. Since its inception in the early 1930s, the parkway has retained an exceptionally high degree of integrity to its original design.
2. The parkway is the highest and longest continuous motor road in the Appalachian region. Reaching an elevation of 6,047 feet along its 469-mile length. The parkway provides easy public access to spectacular scenery of five major mountain ranges as well as agricultural landscapes in the central and southern Appalachian Mountains.
3. Encompassing geographic and vegetative zones that range in elevation from approximately 600 feet at James River in Virginia to 6,411 feet at Richland Balsam summit in North Carolina, parkway lands protect a diverse range of flora and fauna, including rare and endangered plant and animal species and globally imperiled natural communities.
4. The parkway conserves a diversity of historically significant examples of 19th and 20th century lifeways, architecture, industry, and transportation associated with the people and communities of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains and their heritage.
5. The parkway was conceived during the Great Depression as a large-scale public works project to create jobs. Today it connects 29 counties, creating a regional identity that continues to contribute to economic vitality.



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.

- **Diversity of Habitat**
- **Recreational Areas and Related Opportunities**
- **Leisure Driving Experience**
- **Designed Landscape and Scenic Integrity**
- **Examples of Appalachian History and Culture**



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.

- **Parkway Design and Landscape.** The parkway incorporates innovative and enduring design, engineering, and construction techniques that harmonize with the landscape; leisurely driving and enjoyment of scenery is the primary objective; the human-manipulated environment continues to shape park management practices.
- **Biology.** The Blue Ridge Parkway has some of the most diverse habitat, and supports more plant and animal species than most parks, in the U.S. national park system; it provides a protected migration corridor for many forms of life; visitors and residents have long interacted with this environment, both adapting to and altering the natural history of the area.
- **Geology.** The multiple mountain ranges of the parkway corridor include the oldest mountain building processes in the world as well as vast mineral resources. The park stands at the summit of many local and regional watersheds that define the hydrological patterns of much of the eastern United States.
- **Local, Regional, and Global Environmental Influences (Such as Air Quality, Weather, and Climate Change).** Forever connected to the surrounding world, the parkway is impacted by numerous complex challenges brought by local, regional, and global environmental influences and society's changing demands. The protection of the parkway's resources depends on sound visitor and resource management practices, combined with the active support and commitment of an engaged citizenry.
- **Human Culture and Land Use.** The Blue Ridge Parkway originated to generate employment and promote tourism in the Appalachian Mountains and continues to influence and provide great economic benefits to the region. The parkway preserves evidence of human occupation from prehistoric to contemporary times; conserves diverse and important examples of architecture, industry, agriculture, transportation, and travel associated with communities in the central and southern Appalachians; and showcases examples of arts, crafts, music, family farms, and social institutions of the region.
- **Recreation and Renewal.** Influenced and shaped by settlement patterns, land uses, public expectations and prevailing social norms, the Blue Ridge Parkway provides visitors access to diverse outdoor recreational opportunities. The parkway offers escape from everyday life, challenge for the mind and body, and rejuvenation, relaxation, and renewal fostered by immersion in the natural and cultural landscape.

Description

Congress allocated funds for the initial construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway to link Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks on June 16, 1933, under authority of the National Industrial Recovery Act (48 Stat. 195, Public Law 73-67). Congress then authorized the National Park Service to administer and manage the parkway on June 30, 1936, (49 Stat. 2041, Public Law 74-848) as amended on June 8, 1940 (54 Stat. 249, Public Law 76-566).

The parkway traverses the states of Virginia and North Carolina through the central and southern Appalachian Mountains, some of the world's oldest. The continuous 469-mile motor road connects Shenandoah National Park to the north with Great Smoky Mountains National Park to the south. Created as a national rural roadway with limited access, the parkway was designed for pleasant motoring, a form of recreational driving free from commercial traffic or stop signs.

The Blue Ridge Parkway travels the crests, ridges, and valleys of five major mountain ranges, encompassing several geographic and vegetative zones ranging in elevation from approximately 600 to more than 6,000 feet above sea level. Visitors experience diverse vistas of scenic Appalachian landscapes ranging from forested ridge tops and mountain slopes to rural rolling farmlands to urban areas. The parkway offers a “ride-a-while, stop-a-while” experience that includes scenic pullouts, recreation areas and opportunities, historic sites, and visitor contact stations. It is known nationally and internationally for its designed landscape as a scenic parkway.

The parkway is many things to many people. It is the longest road planned as a single park unit in the United States. It contiguously protects significant mountain landscapes far beyond the shoulders of the road itself. Its range of geography and topography provides visitors access to high mountain passes, splendid natural “gardens” of flowering mountain plants, waterfalls and water gaps, deep forests, and upland meadows. It provides a continuous series of panoramic views, the boundaries of the parkway's limited right-of-way rarely

apparent, and miles of the adjacent countryside seemingly a part of the protected scene. Historic scenes along the parkway illustrate the diverse social, economic, and cultural groups of the region, as well as the role of the National Park Service in presenting their stories to the motoring public. It is the product of a series of major public works projects that provided a boost to the travel and tourism industry and helped the Appalachian region climb out of the depths of the Great Depression. It is an important neighbor that links 29 counties through two states and shares boundaries with other national park system units, national forests, tribal lands, and state parks.

The Blue Ridge Parkway and the corridor it travels through are a complex fusion of overlapping jurisdictions, interests, and responsibilities. Strong and coordinated external relations are vital to the parkway's management and mission. Formal and informal partner organizations provide essential services, staffing, funding, and innovative solutions to management of this linear park and the corridor through which it passes. It is frequently the most heavily visited unit of the national park system.

