



# Foundation Document Overview

## Zion National Park

Utah



### Contact Information

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## Park Description

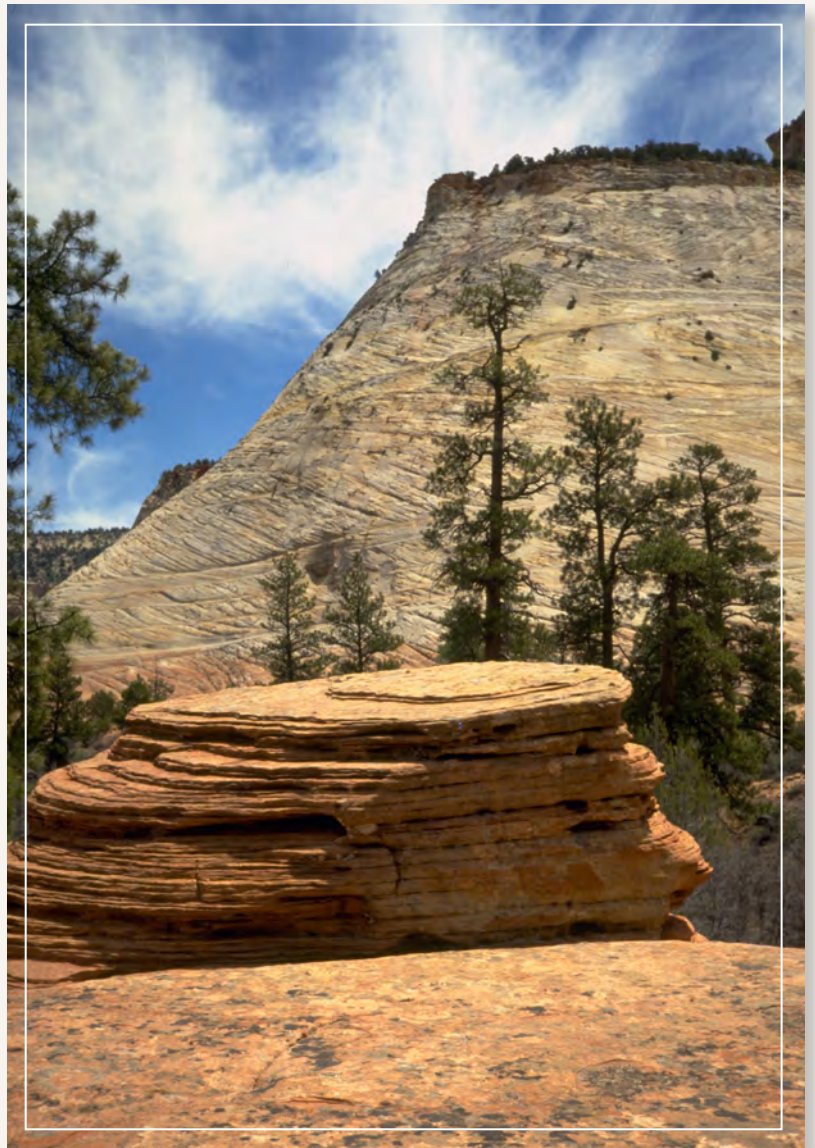
Located in Washington, Iron, and Kane counties in southwestern Utah, Zion National Park encompasses some of the most scenic canyon country in the United States. The park is characterized by high plateaus, a maze of narrow, deep, sandstone canyons, and striking rock towers and mesas. The North Fork of the Virgin River has carved a spectacular gorge through Zion Canyon, where sandstone walls rise 2,000 to 3,000 feet above the canyon floor. The southern part of the park is a lower desert area, with colorful mesas bordered by rocky canyons and washes. The northern sections of the park are higher plateaus covered by forests.

Zion is one of the earliest additions to the national park system. On July 31, 1909, President William H. Taft issued a proclamation setting aside 15,200 acres as the Mukuntuweap National Monument. In 1918 another presidential proclamation enlarged the monument to 76,800 acres and changed its name to Zion National Monument. Congress established the area as a national park in 1919. A second Zion National Monument (now called the Kolob Canyons) was established by presidential proclamation in 1937. Congress added the Kolob Canyons to Zion National Park in 1956. The park currently encompasses 148,733 acres.

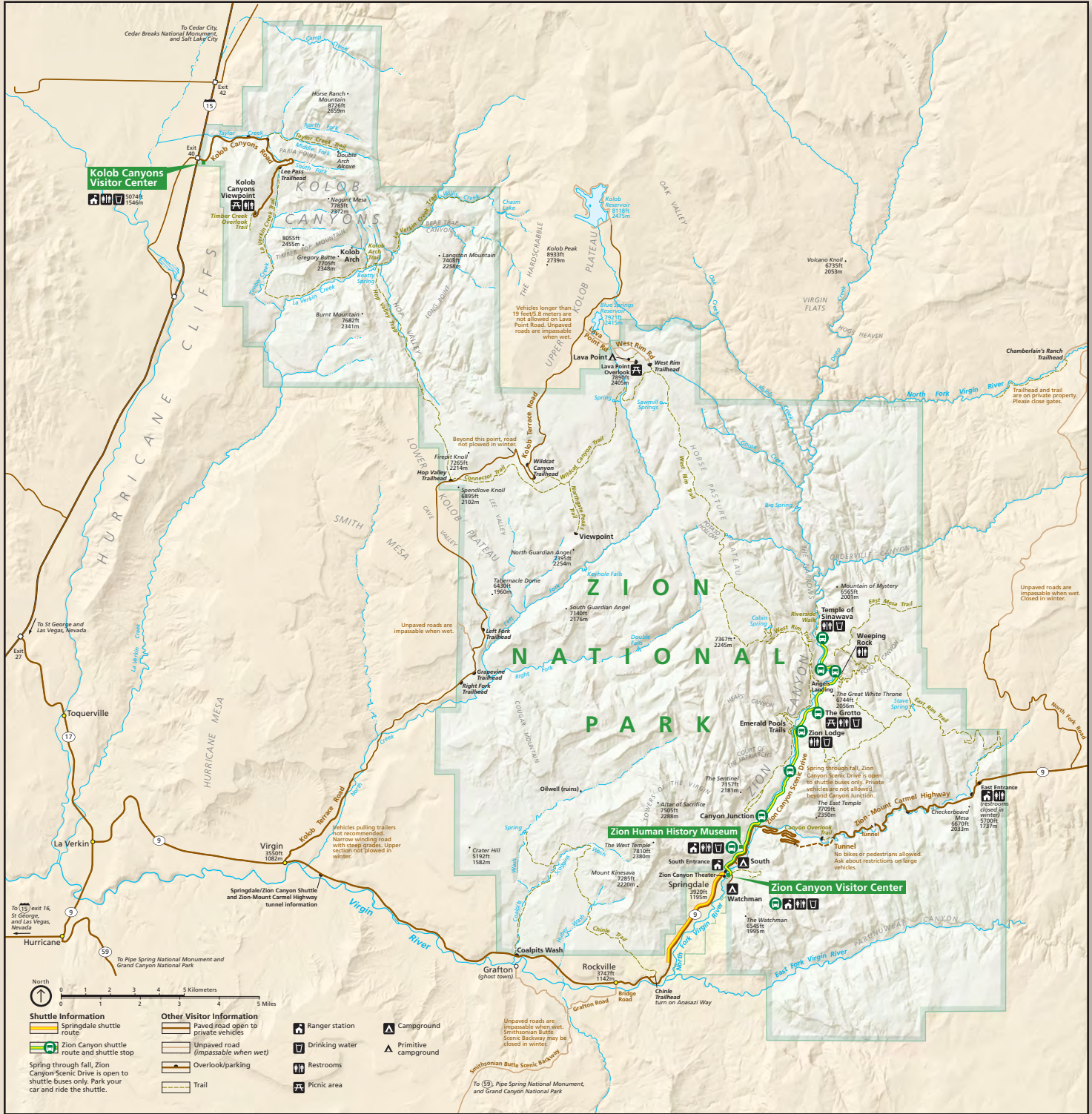
On March 30, 2009, the Omnibus Public Land Management Act (Public Law 111-11) designated the vast majority of Zion National Park as wilderness. A total of 124,462 acres of Zion is designated wilderness (84% of the park), and 9,047 acres (6% of the park) are recommended for wilderness designation. This means that 90% of the park is managed as wilderness, as per NPS policy. The legislation also designated 144 miles of wild and scenic rivers in Zion National Park, the first wild and scenic rivers designated in Utah.

Zion's spectacular scenery attracts visitors from all over the world. Visitation to the park was about 3 million people in 2012. Visitors to Zion enjoy deep cool canyons, high wooded plateaus, and vast warm deserts. Zion offers a variety of recreational opportunities and activities including driving scenic roads, hiking, backpacking, canyoneering, photography, and wildlife viewing, to name a few.

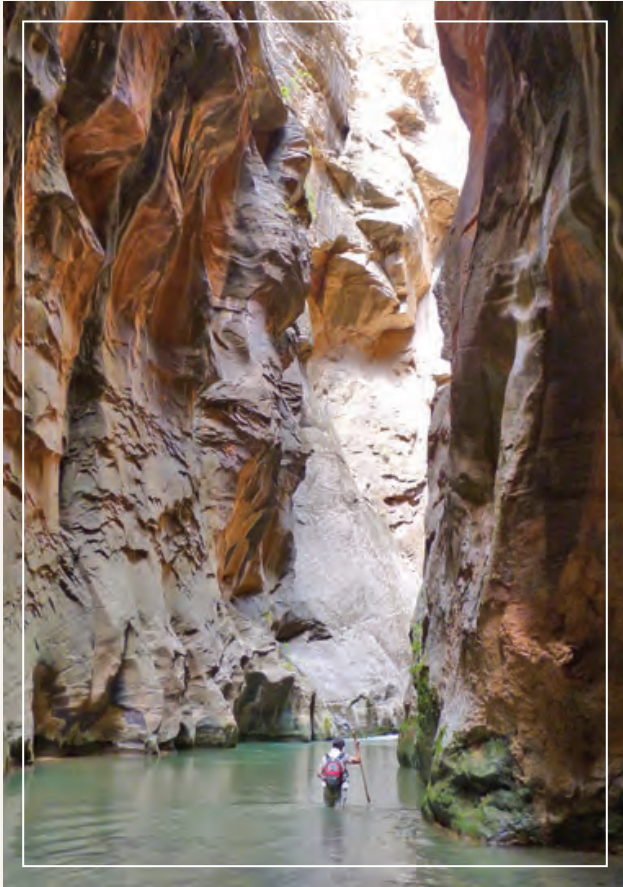
Zion is a leader in protecting natural resources and embracing sustainable practices that reduce the effects of park operations on climate change. In order to accomplish this, Zion has implemented sustainable policies and practices. Examples included eliminating the need to purchase bottled water in plastic containers by providing and publicizing water bottle filling stations; creating a recycling program for staff, visitors, and concessioners; installing solar panels that provide electricity to many of the park buildings; and using energy efficient vehicles. These actions will help Zion meet the challenge of the National Park Service to leave park resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.



# Park Map



## Purpose



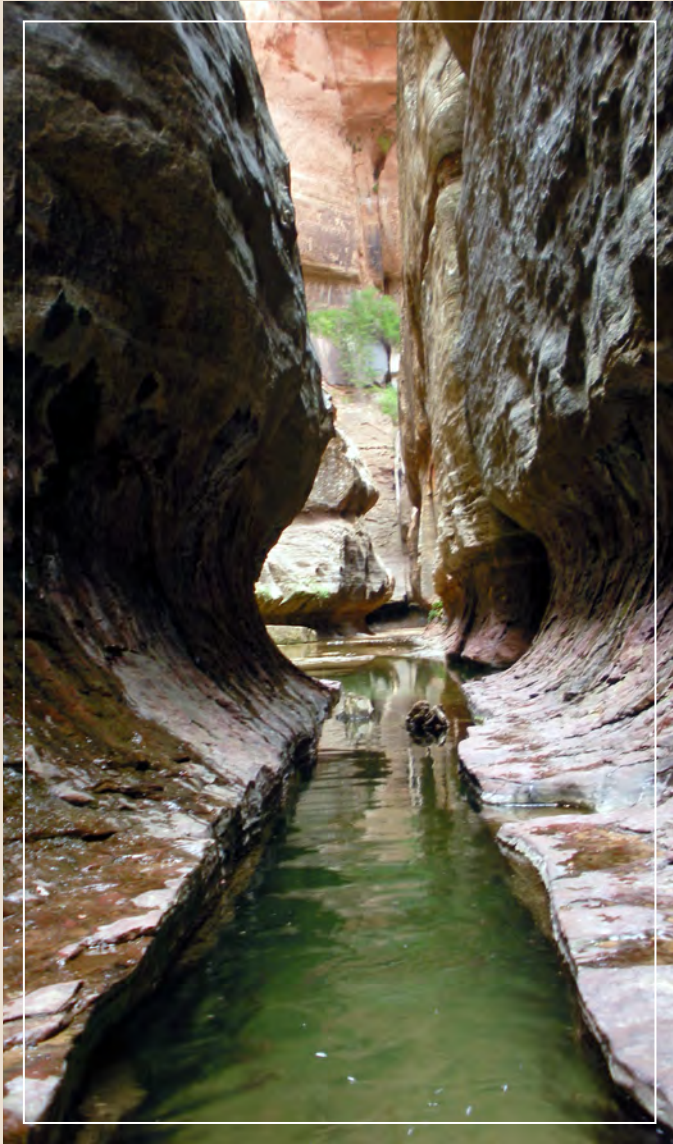
*The purpose of ZION NATIONAL PARK is to preserve the dramatic geology including Zion Canyon and a labyrinth of deep and brilliantly colored Navajo sandstone canyons formed by extraordinary processes of erosion at the margin of the Colorado Plateau; to safeguard the park's wilderness character and its wild and scenic river values; to protect evidence of human history; and to provide for scientific research and the enjoyment and enlightenment of the public.*

## Significance

Significance statements express why Zion 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.

- Zion is a geologic showcase of brilliantly colored strata highlighted by sheer Navajo sandstone cliffs that are among the highest in the world and expose ancient remnants of the largest known sand dune system. Geologic processes continue today as the free-flowing Virgin River rapidly cuts into the margin of the Colorado Plateau, incising a multitude of deep, narrow canyons. An abundance of canyon springs, fed by groundwater, create hanging gardens and grottos that support endemic varieties of flora and fauna. These exceptional features and processes contribute to the outstanding scenery and scientific value of the park.
- Zion National Park's range of topography and location at the juncture of the Colorado Plateau, Mojave Desert, and Great Basin ecoregions have created the environment for a wide variety of life forms, including rare and endemic species that exist only in this small geographic area. This diversity of life forms provides opportunities for valuable scientific research.





- In a canyon environment, Zion preserves human history of the Ancestral Puebloan, Paiute, pioneers, early 20th century tourism, and NPS development along the Virgin River. The remarkable integrity of these resources provides a setting ideal for future education and research.
- Zion National Park is a world-renowned destination that offers opportunities for a range of recreational and educational experiences including passive activities and high adventure excursions. Visitors are able to step inside the scenery and can find themselves surrounded by narrow cliff walls in places of extraordinary scale such as the Virgin River Narrows. These experiences often create profound emotional and personal connections for a diversity of visitors.

- The Zion Wilderness preserves the undeveloped character and natural environment of the spectacular network of colorful deep sandstone canyons, high forested plateaus, and striking rock towers, as well as opportunities for visitors to experience a strong sense of solitude and remoteness from civilization.
- Utah's first designated wild and scenic rivers flow through the park carving a colorful labyrinth of canyons across layers of time. These rivers, fed by natural undiminished spring flows from the Navajo sandstone aquifers and sculpted by unimpeded torrents of flood waters, have an ecological value that far exceeds their spatial extent in the park.



# 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.

- **Geologic Showcase.** Zion's spectacular sedimentary layers form the center of the Grand Staircase, the great regional sequence of cliffs and slopes linking the ancient rocks of Grand Canyon, through the Mesozoic layers of Zion, to the high plateaus of Bryce Canyon and Cedar Breaks. Zion contains the finest exposure of Navajo sandstone, in places exceeding 2,000 feet in thickness, a remnant of the largest sand dune system known to have existed on the planet. In addition to the dramatic high cliffs, the park displays a landscape modified by recent volcanism and an exceptionally rapid rate of erosion. These natural processes have produced large landslides, inverted valleys, deep slot canyons, hanging valleys, and have exposed significant paleontological resources.

- **Water Shapes the Landscape.** The park's many free-flowing rivers carry powerful flash floods and tremendous sediment loads, which act together as the primary agents of erosion. These rivers continue to carve into the edge of the Colorado Plateau, shaping Zion's dramatic scenery. By virtue of rivers cutting through the water-bearing Navajo sandstone, numerous canyon springs, fed by groundwater, create hanging gardens and seeping alcoves that form moist oases in a desert environment and sustain perennial river flows.



- **Convergence of Ecoregions.** The convergence of the Colorado Plateau, Mojave Desert, and Great Basin ecoregions combined with the vertical relief and high concentration of canyons has provided a diversity of habitats for the array of life forms found in Zion National Park, including rare, endangered, and endemic species.

- **Natural Resource Quality and Function.** The quality of air, water, vegetation, and wildlife resources in Zion National Park are generally preserved, in some cases by allowing natural processes and natural disturbance regimes (such as fires, floods, and rockfalls) to exist, thereby promoting an environment predominated by natural processes. Wildland fire, in particular, provides the natural disturbance regime that maintains many of the park's ecosystems and is critical to maintaining wilderness character and associated natural resource values.

- **Wilderness Character.** Eighty-four percent of Zion is designated wilderness, managed with restraint and humility to protect the natural character of the landscape. The vast majority of this wilderness is entirely undeveloped with no trails, campsites, or structures. Even in a park with millions of visitors each year one can explore and experience the sights and sounds of solitude.



- **Wild and Scenic Rivers.** Zion's wild and scenic rivers provide for a wide range of river values and are composed of more than 140 miles of free-flowing, largely undeveloped water courses that provide habitat for six native fish species. In recent geologic time, the rivers have sliced through rock layers thousands of feet thick. The carved canyons provide habitat for the threatened Mexican spotted owl and cool canyon microclimates are home to hanging gardens where the endemic Zion snail resides.



- **The Remnants of Humanity’s Past.** The cultural resources in Zion National Park encompass a continuum of human experience of both native and nonnative people. The nationally significant Parunuweap Canyon Archeological District contains “type” sites through which the Virgin Branch of the Anasazi were initially recognized as a distinctive regional manifestation of Ancestral Puebloan culture. For contemporary people, including American Indians and European American descendants of pioneers, many of the park’s cultural sites, objects, landscapes, and natural resources remain important touchstones that contribute to group identity and heritage.
- **Opportunities for Connection to the Resources.** Zion National Park provides its visitors a wide range of high-quality recreational experiences through exceptional infrastructure and services, educational opportunities, and resources of high integrity. Zion National Park interprets park resource meanings, research, and management initiatives to encourage inspiration, learning, and stewardship.
- **Preserving and Studying the Natural and Cultural History of Zion.** Museum and archival collections record Zion’s natural and cultural history. Park collections illuminate the stories of American Indians, pioneers, NPS history, and the park’s complex natural environment—documenting a long and highly active history of scientific study and scholarly research. The collection also demonstrates the ongoing importance of continued scientific study to develop and implement best management practices.

Zion 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.

- **An Engineered Way of Life.** The Zion Lodge / Birch Creek Historic District represents early economic development and tourism inside the Grand Circle and Southern Utah. Residences and maintenance buildings in the Oak Creek and Pine Creek historic districts are intricate pieces of early NPS history representing naturalistic / NPS-rustic construction. The Zion-Mt. Carmel Highway and tunnel represent the determination, innovation, and engineering feats of the early 20th century. Other roads, trails, ditches, bridges, cabins, and remnants of sawmills and homesteads showcase early pioneering efforts inside Zion National Park and NPS efforts to develop facilities for visitor access and accommodation. Parunuweap Canyon contains prehistoric, intact, and valuable cultural resources that provide a valuable insight to prehistoric ways of life. Zion preserves and studies these diverse cultures and their engineered ways of life in the desert environment.



## 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.

- The geologic features of Zion National Park, including the premier exposure of Navajo sandstone, the brilliantly colored rock layers, and Zion's place in the Grand Staircase, are both scientifically significant and allow us to immerse ourselves within their immense scope of size and time.
- The wild and scenic Virgin River and its tributaries are the lifeblood of Zion National Park, continuing to carve with powerful force as they drop uncontrolled through the landscape, to reveal Zion's geologic history, shape majestic canyons, and provide a unique watery oasis amidst the arid land.
- Located at the convergence of three ecoregions, Zion National Park contains a richness and diversity of flora and fauna that belies the park's extreme topography and arid conditions.



- The undeveloped vast high plateaus and intimate sandstone canyons of Zion National Park and its designated wilderness provide unparalleled opportunities for a limited number of visitors to experience solitude, adventure, inspiration, and introspection in a natural environment, while creating a backdrop for all to appreciate the importance of protecting wild places.
- Zion National Park is the setting for a legacy of generations of people, all of whom lived their lives deeply connected to this landscape.