

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY 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 park significance statements and fundamental resources and values.

Interpretive themes are an organizational tool that reveal and clarify meaning, concepts, contexts, and values represented by park resources. Sound themes are accurate and reflect current scholarship and science. They encourage exploration of the context in which events or natural processes occurred and the effects of those events and processes. Interpretive themes go beyond a mere description of the event or process to foster multiple opportunities to experience and consider the park and its resources. These themes help explain why a park story is relevant to people who may otherwise be unaware of connections they have to an event, time, or place associated with the park.

The following interpretive themes have been identified for the Blue Ridge Parkway:

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.