



Paleontology

Earth's Natural Library: Reading the Stories!



Both photos: Dinosaur remains in Curecanti NRA ©NPCA/Christa Cherava

286

NATIONAL PARK
UNITS CONTAIN
PALEO RESOURCES

18

UNITS WERE
SPECIFICALLY
DESIGNATED FOR
THAT REASON

Summer 2023

Our National Park System (NPS) contains nearly 2 billion years of paleontological and geologic history—where these resources represent stories that took nearly that long to make through natural processes of preservation.

The NPS possesses some of the best-preserved fossil specimens—many being *holotypes*, which means that they are the main specimen in which a new species is based on and/or described scientifically. While most of their fossils are found *in situ*—within the natural geologic context, some are also found stored in museum collections or residing within a cultural and/or historical resource context (i.e. jewelry, building and monument materials, etc.). The number of localities is always increasing, as more continue to be unearthed in the existing parks. Although 2/3 of the NPS units contain paleo resources, only a small percentage were specifically designated for the protection of these resources in their enabling legislation. This also means that those places and their fossils were deemed *nationally significant* to be protected!

Fossils are **non-renewable** resources meaning once they are destroyed, we will never be able to recreate them. Consider the

vast life on earth that has existed in the past—and the mere fraction of that life preserved as fossils. They are extraordinarily rare and the brief glimpse that they provide of a past that is almost incomprehensible is something we can't afford to lose as the system's **oldest** resources.

Although NPCA doesn't have a specific campaign surrounding these resources, we proactively support the protection of them through the following measures:

Education & Outreach

- Connects with NPS Paleo staff to identify opportunities of direct collaboration. This includes using NPCA's communication platforms to share updates, stories, events, and activities that will highlight public engagement and inform our audiences of the vast resources included in the park system.

Legislation & Policy

- Legislative efforts include NPCA writing and submitting comments that support the highest protection standards for these resources and addressing adequate funding needs to continue their interpretation (e.g. [The Paleontological Resources Preservation Act](#)).
- Tracking all applicable legislation and bills that are introduced that would directly or indirectly have an impact on paleo resources throughout the Department of Interior.
- Government Affairs and Regional Offices work to expand existing park units with these resources and work to protect others from external development threats. Additionally, designating new units can be advocated for when deemed appropriate.
- Lobby for adequate funding (increased budget and more staff) for this department of NPS and associated units.

With NPCA departments working together and utilizing the relationship with [NPS Paleontology](#), while also engaging in other partnerships that strengthen our alliance, these highly significant scientific resources can continue to be protected with the promise that those yet to be discovered will also be preserved and interpreted properly.



Memory and Longevity.

Think of landscapes and geologic features as open books—those that can be read by those who know the language. Think of the fossils as the quotes and remarks that stand out to the reader the most. What do they say?

Paleontology is a multidisciplinary field of study—it requires knowledge in various scientific areas. Based on that, fossils, and their associated geologic context, provide an interpretation of past climates and environments by preserving natural data and information—even down to the bio- and geochemical levels of something as specific as the prehistoric organism itself—or as broad as the atmospheric conditions!

CONTACT INFORMATION: Christa Cherava, ccherava@npca.org, cell: (970) 623-6882.