

THE NATIONAL NATURAL LANDMARKS PROGRAM

Fact Sheet

America has a wealth of natural resources which constitute a rich and diverse natural heritage. National Natural Landmarks are among the best examples of this natural heritage.

A National Natural Landmark is a select portion of America's land and waters -- a true and representative example of the Nation's natural history. National Natural Landmarks range from such famous areas as Mount Katahdin, Maine; The Great Dismal Swamp, Virginia; Point Lobos, California; Shishaldin Volcano, Alaska; and Okefenokee Swamp, Georgia, to other equally significant but lesser known areas. Taken together, National Natural Landmarks illustrate the array of terrestrial and aquatic communities, landforms, geological features, and habitats of threatened plant and animal species that constitute the Nation's natural history.

The National Natural Landmarks Program was established in 1963 by the Secretary of the Interior to encourage the preservation of areas that illustrate the ecological and geological character of the United States, to enhance the educational and scientific value of the areas thus preserved, to strengthen cultural appreciation of natural history, and to foster a wider interest and concern in the conservation of the Nation's natural heritage. The program was transferred from the National Park Service, which had administered it from its inception, to the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS) when it was created in January of 1978.

The mission of HCRS is to plan, evaluate, and coordinate the conservation of the Nation's natural and cultural resources, and to assure adequate recreation opportunities for all its people. One of the major responsibilities of HCRS is to assist in the conservation of a variety of significant natural areas which, when considered together, will illustrate the diversity of the Nation's natural history. This aim is realized through the identification and designation of National Natural Landmarks and listing them on the National Registry of Natural Landmarks, which is periodically published in the Federal Register.

THE DESIGNATION PROCESS

HCRS conducts studies of ecological and geological resources in the 33 natural regions (e.g. Appalachian Plateaus, Gulf Coastal Plain, etc.) of the United States, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and Pacific Trust Territories to provide a logical and scientific basis for designating National Natural Landmarks. Each study produces a classification and description of the ecological and geological features of the natural region, plus a list of areas recommended for National Natural Landmark status.

These recommended areas are reviewed by ecologists and geologists and the appropriate HCRS regional office to assess their potential national significance. Their recommendations are forwarded to the central landmark staff located in the Mid-Continent Regional Office in Denver, where they are reviewed and submitted to the Secretary of the Interior for final approval and Landmark designation.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Landmark status is ascribed to areas which best illustrate or interpret the natural history of the United States.

Examples of this natural history include several types of ecological and geological resources: (1) terrestrial and aquatic communities, such as an ecological community that illustrates the characteristics of a biome, or a relict flora or fauna persisting from an earlier period; (2) geological features and land forms, such as geological formations that illustrate geological processes or fossil evidence of the development of life on earth; and (3) habitats of rare or restricted native plant and animal species.

Criteria for National Natural Landmark status are used to evaluate examples of the types of ecological and geological resources outlined above. These criteria include, but are not limited to, the following considerations: (1) how well the nominated example typifies the ecological and geological resource; (2) the present condition of the nominated example; (3) the anticipated long-term viability of the example as reflected in the size and quality of the surrounding natural area which contains it; (4) the defensibility of the example from detrimental outside influences; (5) the rarity of the type of resource represented by the example; and (6) the number of high quality examples of different natural resources which the area contains.

CONSERVATION OF LANDMARKS

In view of their national significance, it is important that the qualities of National Natural Landmarks be maintained.

Official recognition of an area in the National Registry of Natural Landmarks often stimulates its owner or manager to protect the area's nationally significant qualities.

Indirect protection is provided by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which requires Federal agencies undertaking major actions to file statements which detail the effect of such actions on the environment, including National Natural Landmarks. In addition, an

