

Internship Gives Natural Landmarks 'Shot in the Arm'

By Stephen J. Maddock

One of the present responsibilities of the National Park Service is to administer the National Natural Landmarks Program. To this end, the Park Service retains a small staff in the Washington Office to oversee the program nationally and the Regional Offices designate one individual each from their respective staffs as a Regional Natural Landmark Coordinator. In the North Atlantic Region, the Landmark Coordinator oversees a system of 90 designated National Natural Landmarks in eight states that includes 21 bogs, 23 swamps or marshes, the Old Man of the Mountains in Franconia Notch, NH, and Mount Katahdin, Maine, the northern terminus of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The Coordinator is also responsible for helping to identify potential landmarks for inclusion in the system and for shepherding their nomination to the Washington Office.

Unfortunately, the title of Landmark Coordinator in the North Atlantic Region is an ancillary one that usually is assumed only after the individual's other duties are sufficiently completed to permit an hour or more of uninterrupted attention to Natural Landmark matters. Thus the Coordinator's efforts often consist of little more than running a clearinghouse for the forwarding of nomination and evaluation papers from state and private sources to the Washington Office and for the delivery of official certificates and bronze plaques from Washington to the owners of National Natural Landmarks.

Given this situation, the North Atlantic Regional Office was approached last spring by an undergraduate student, Jennifer Atkinson, majoring in zoology at Connecticut College. She asked whether we would be interested in obtaining her services for the summer in exchange for one-third of her salary and a specific project for a period of 12 weeks. We asked her to explain, since this sounded like the proverbial "free lunch." She stated that she was applying for an environmental internship sponsored by EIP/Northeast, a private, nonprofit organization that assists environmental groups in obtaining talented young people for short-term employment. EIP/Northeast would pay two-thirds of her salary if she could locate an environmental organization or agency that was willing to provide the remaining salary and a significant summer project. This seemed to be a perfect opportunity to revitalize the National Natural Landmark Program within the North Atlantic Region, and without further hesitation, we agreed to help her obtain the internship she sought.

With minimal help from us, our prospective intern submitted a project outline to EIP/Northeast explaining how she planned to enhance North Atlantic's Natural Landmark Program over the course of the summer. We, in turn, indicated to EIP/Northeast our approval of her outline and our enthusiasm in having her assistance. We also signed a cooperative agreement with EIP/Northeast which enabled us to pay our financial obligation to our intern through EIP, thereby avoiding carrying her as an employee of NPS. By late May, she was working full-time on the Landmarks Program.



Lynnfield Marsh National Natural Landmark is prime waterfowl habitat in Eastern Massachusetts.



Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge National Natural Landmark, Little Cherry Pond, with Mount Waumbec in distance.

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Cherry Pond, with Presidential Range in distance. The highest peak (fourth from the left) is Mount Washington, site of the proposed Mount Washington Summit National Natural Landmark.

During the course of the summer, the effectiveness of the Landmarks Program was markedly increased. The usual clearinghouse efforts of the Landmark Coordinator were augmented sufficiently to enable us to provide both the Washington Office and state and private cooperators with immediate service, rather than the one to two week delay we are often forced to operate with because of other more pressing duties. Tardy evaluation reports were tracked down and their authors duly reminded to get them finished. Owners of designated, but as yet unregistered, Landmarks were contacted to see whether they would be willing to entertain registration and whether they would like to have a bronze plaque commemorating such registration. Program files were reorganized and consolidated, and each official Landmark folder was carefully checked for completeness. For once, routine business was up to date.

More importantly, we were now able to spend some time visiting existing and potential Landmarks. One of the most interesting visits we made was to the Ellenville Fault-Ice Caves NNL, located high on the main ridge of the Shawangunk Mountains in southeastern New York State. Here the Village of Ellenville proposes to develop a 130-acre parcel adjacent to the Natural Landmark as a wind energy farm. The project would consist of 71 vertical axis wind turbines that would be clearly visible on the top of the ridge, even though they could not be seen directly from the fault and the ice caves. We testified at a public hearing held in Ellenville, registering our concern that the construction of the wind turbines and the necessary access roads within the landmark could compromise the natural character for which the landmark was established. We also visited two landmarks in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, two landmarks in southern New Hampshire, one in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts, three in eastern Mas-

sachusetts, and a potential landmark on Block Island, R.I.

Over the course of our intern's tenure, we accomplished a number of other important tasks. Two dedication ceremonies were held, with Mrs. Mary Lou Grier, NPS Deputy Director, officiating at each one. One of these ceremonies, marking the official registration Number 5 Bog and Jack Pine Stand in northern Maine, involved the least amount of time ever recorded between the date of a Landmark's designation and the official ceremony commemorating its recognition since the inception of the National Natural Landmark Program in 1962. We met with five of our eight State Coordinators to clarify program directives and priorities. These meetings further strengthened the program by fortifying our contacts and demonstrating our appreciation of the state-level efforts.

By the time our intern returned to Connecticut College for the fall semester, the Landmarks Program was running as well as it ever has. Evaluation reports were under way for two significant mountain top sites in New Hampshire – Mount Washington and Mount Monadnock – and peer reviews were completed for six potential landmarks that had previously received favorable evaluations. The State Coordinators in Massachusetts and New Hampshire had just contacted us in an effort to begin the process of nominating new sites as potential landmarks and the State Coordinator in Maine asked if we could help fund an effort by his state to evaluate at least one potential landmark during the ensuing summer field season. Clearly, the opportunity to have a full-time assistant assigned to the Landmarks Program had paid off.

This tremendous infusion of energy has, of course, raised the expectations of our many friends to a level that will be difficult to maintain, given the resources available to the Landmarks Program. Our State Coordinators continue to inquire about the eligibility of

additional sites for inclusion in our list of potential Natural Landmarks. We have to tell them that for each site, they must first file with our Washington Office both a description of the area and why this site should be considered worthy of Landmark status.

Once the Washington Office of Natural Landmarks determines that the area qualifies as a potential Natural Landmark, we may schedule an evaluation of the site. This site evaluation is then done by a local natural scientist, and his evaluation report is subjected to peer reviews by at least three natural scientists and staff review at both the Regional and Washington levels. Following this, a decision is finally made as to whether or not to recommend the site to the Secretary of the Interior for Landmark designation. The whole process takes at least a year to complete and usually much longer, since the site evaluation and the three peer reviews frequently involve contracts with individuals outside the federal government and these contracts are dependent upon the availability of very limited program funds.

Undoubtedly, we will not be able to process the many requests from our State Coordinators here in the North Atlantic Region as rapidly as either we or they would like. But we do hope to continue to add to our system of designated Landmarks every site that is deserving of the National Natural Landmark title and to seek ways to improve the North Atlantic Region's Natural Landmark Program.

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