

Virginia NPS Sites Surveyed For Rarest Plants, Animals

In 1988, the Mid-Atlantic Region entered into a major Cooperative Agreement with the Virginia Natural Heritage Program to survey portions of the Commonwealth of Virginia containing Mid-Atlantic Region NPS lands to ascertain the presence and current status of rare or endangered plant and animal species as well as significant and exemplary natural communities. These lands include Shenandoah NP, occupying the Northern Blue Ridge in Virginia; George Washington Birthplace and Booker T. Washington National Monuments; Colonial and Appomattox Courthouse National Historic Parks; and Petersburg, Richmond, and Fredericksburg/Spotsylvania National Battlefield Parks.

The inventory will aid the NPS in decisions concerning land use, maintenance activities, public access, citing of recreational facilities, and management of areas containing rare elements of natural diversity. All information gathered in this study will be supplied to the NPS and also incorporated in the Natural Heritage Program Biological and Conservation Data System.

Established in 1986 with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Historic Resources, the program is responsible for collecting data regarding the state's rarest plants, animals, natural communities and other special features as a permanent, dynamic library containing the rare elements of natural diversity, continually updated and maintained by the Natural Heritage Program.

Since many rare and endangered species in Virginia are located in private lands and are subject to intense development pressures and extensive habitat destruction, the preservation of rare species must be considered as a primary criteria in the development of future NP management plans. Rare species and significant natural communities documented in reports from past studies performed within the park land boundaries are usually presented in a general geographic area with few site specific locations noted. As plans for these NPS lands are formalized and carried out, site specific locations for rare species will be an asset.

The rarity status of species found in the inventory will be determined. Records of each rare species' distribution in Virginia will be reviewed by the Natural Heritage Program; moreover, the status of each species on a global scale, utilizing the National Natural Heritage Network will be determined. A rarity hierarchy formulated from this combined information will be invaluable in determining which species and natural communities should receive immediate attention and which are potentially less vulnerable.

The information gathered in the inventory will be valuable to the Virginia Department of Conservation and Historic Resources and the NPS in their respective missions of preserving natural biological diversity in the Commonwealth and will promote a continuing partnership in sharing and updating information in the future.

The major objectives of the inventory are to:

1. Identify records, occurrences and status of plant and animal species and vegetative communities within, adjacent to, or potentially occurring in Virginia NPS sites of the Mid-Atlantic Region, listed as rare, threatened or endangered by state and federal agencies;

2. Field survey and verify locations or recorded occurrences;

3. Field survey potential habitat locations for new occurrences of rare species or communities likely to be present;

4. Document existing conditions of element occurrences and recommend management requirements; and

5. Record and map all historical, previously recorded and extant rare species and community locations according to standard Heritage Program methods and procedures.

In cooperation with the Mid-Atlantic Region and individual parks, up-to-date boundaries of authorized and federally owned lands for the parks of interest have been obtained and transferred to Virginia Heritage Program USGS 7½' topographic maps. Land ownership information has been recorded in the Heritage managed area and element occurrence databases for any element occurrence located within these boundaries that had not been previously identified as on NPS lands. Appropriate herbaria and museums are being searched for existing records of occurrences of the rare species and communities of interest within or adjacent to the Virginia NPS areas. All collected information is being entered on relevant Heritage Program forms, databases and maps. A literature review is underway as well.

Based on updated information on the rare plant, animal and community occurrences, and in cooperation with the NPS, a work plan of site and species priorities for field survey in the 1990 and 1991 field seasons will be developed. Priorities will include previously recorded occurrences and new sites that have a high potential for containing species or communities of interest according to their habitat requirements. According to the approved work plan, extant sites or occurrences will be inventoried and mapped; information on site location, population numbers and condition, habitat and site requirements, degree of site endangerment and known or suspected threats, management recommendations and other items will be recorded on standard Heritage Program forms, maps and databases.

Any rare species located during the field surveys will be photographed and colored slides will be provided

for use by the appropriate Park Resource Management and Interpretive Programs. Collection of plant material will be kept to a minimum and those specimens collected will be prepared and deposited according to NPS standards.

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Three BRs Meet To Examine Roles

Three Biosphere Reserves in the northern Rocky Mountains – Glacier NP and the Coram NF in the U.S., and Waterton Lakes NP in Canada – sponsored an August 1989 seminar entitled "Crown of the Continent into the 21st Century: A Perspective Under the MAB Program." The seminar was held to introduce the Man and the Biosphere program to land managers, visitors, the general public, and employees of the three BR areas involved. Biologists, historians, and tourism and development representatives from Canada and the U.S. also attended.

The first day focused on the MAB program and current land management trends in the region. Key-note speaker Bjorn Dahl told how the MAB program works in the Southern Appalachians. Dahl emphasized that key players in the program need to include the states and public as well as federal agencies. Noting that the northern Rocky Mountains has not experienced the serious human pressures the Southern Appalachians has, Dahl expressed his opinion that the 'Crown of the Continent' could be an exemplary MAB area. With the vast relatively undisturbed resources there is an opportunity for research, education, conservation, and sustainable use.

The second day emphasis was on developing understanding of the cultural and biological history and diversity of the area. Curly Bear Wagner, a member of the Blackfoot Tribe, discussed Blackfoot history and culture, and the Indians' philosophies regarding the land. There was also a presentation on man's influence in Glacier NP. Speakers highlighted the biology and management of wolves, grizzly bears, bald eagles, and peregrine falcons, four threatened or endangered species selected because their vast ranges expand beyond the northern Rocky Mountain region. Dick Hutto, a University of Montana professor, addressed biological diversity, ecosystem management, and concerns regarding single species management.

Current trends in resource utilization was the focus of the final day: Trends, and current and future needs for development and tourism in the Flathead Valley.

A common thread in each speaker's talk was that the resources and their utilization must be managed cooperatively in this region. The desire is to maintain biological diversity and integrity in areas such as Glacier and Waterton Lakes NPs and the Bob Marshall Wilderness while we explore resource utilization in adjacent lands. These activities must be coordinated so that man and the natural resources can coexist in the Crown of the Continent.

This seminar serves as the catalyst for future MAB discussions in this area. A meeting of the local land managers is tentatively scheduled for late October or November to develop strategy for arousing interest and support for the MAB program in this area.

Laurie Kurth, Ecologist
Rocky Mountain NP

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