

Preserving natural spaces



Gazette-Mail file photo

The sun begins to rise over Bear Rocks Preserve in Dolly Sods in 2017, as seen in this composite image of 7 vertical photos stitched together.

Bear Rocks and Allegheny Front Preserve named new National Natural Landmark

By **RICK STEELHAMMER**
Staff writer

A 1,204 acre tract of heath barrens, high-elevation cranberry bogs, windswept red spruce trees and flat-topped sedimentary boulders perched on the eastern edge of the Dolly Sods plateau has been named America's 600th National Natural Landmark.

Former U.S. Interior Secretary David Barnhardt announced the new designation for the Bear Rocks and Allegh-

eny Front Preserve on Jan. 19 in one of his last official actions in office.

Acquired and managed by The Nature Conservancy, the preserve straddles the Grant-Tucker County border, and adjoins the Monongahela National Forest and its Dolly Sods Wilderness.

The National Natural Landmarks program, administered by the National Park Service, recognizes and encourages the conservation of sites judged to possess outstanding biological

and geological resources.

A peer-reviewed evaluation of the site found it to contain globally rare plant communities and animal species and serve as a prime example of how tectonic activity and continental collision formed regionally important mountain and plateau landscapes.

The designation "brings a national spotlight and significance to a place West Virginians have known to be special for decades," said Mike Powell, director of lands for The Na-

ture Conservancy in West Virginia.

The new National Natural Landmark combines land from the Bear Rocks Preserve, a 477-acre tract donated to the Conservancy in 2000 by Dominion Energy, and adjacent land in the Allegheny Front Preserve, acquired in 2018 with funds from the Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund and private donors.

The Nature Conservancy's

SEE **ROCKS, 6A**



KENT MASON | Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

This photo shows the 1,143 acres of land donated to The Nature Conservancy, from the vantage point of Bear Rocks Preserve.

ROCKS

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efforts to preserve Dolly Sods date back to the 1970s, when it bought the mineral rights underlying 15,000 acres of the plateau and transferred them to the U.S. Forest Service, making possible the creation of the Dolly Sods Wilderness. De-

cares later, the Conservancy bought about 7,000 acres of adjacent land atop the plateau known as Dolly Sods North and held the property until the Forest Service received funding to acquire it.

Habitat in the Bear Rocks and Allegheny Front Preserve helps support 26 rare and protected species that live on the plateau, ranging from from the

Cheat Mountain salamander to the snowshoe hare, and provides food and shelter for migrating songbirds traveling the Eastern Appalachian Flyway.

Other National Natural Landmarks include the La Brea Tar Pits and San Andreas Fault in California; Mount Katahdin, Maine's highest peak and the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail; Virgin-

ia's Luray Caverns; West Virginia's Canaan Valley, Cathedral State Forest, Lost World Cavern, Organ Cave System, and The Nature Conservancy's Ice Mountain Preserve in Hampshire County.

Reach Rick Steelhammer at rsteelhammer@wvgazette.com, 304-348-5169 or follow [@rsteelhammer](https://twitter.com/rsteelhammer) on Twitter.