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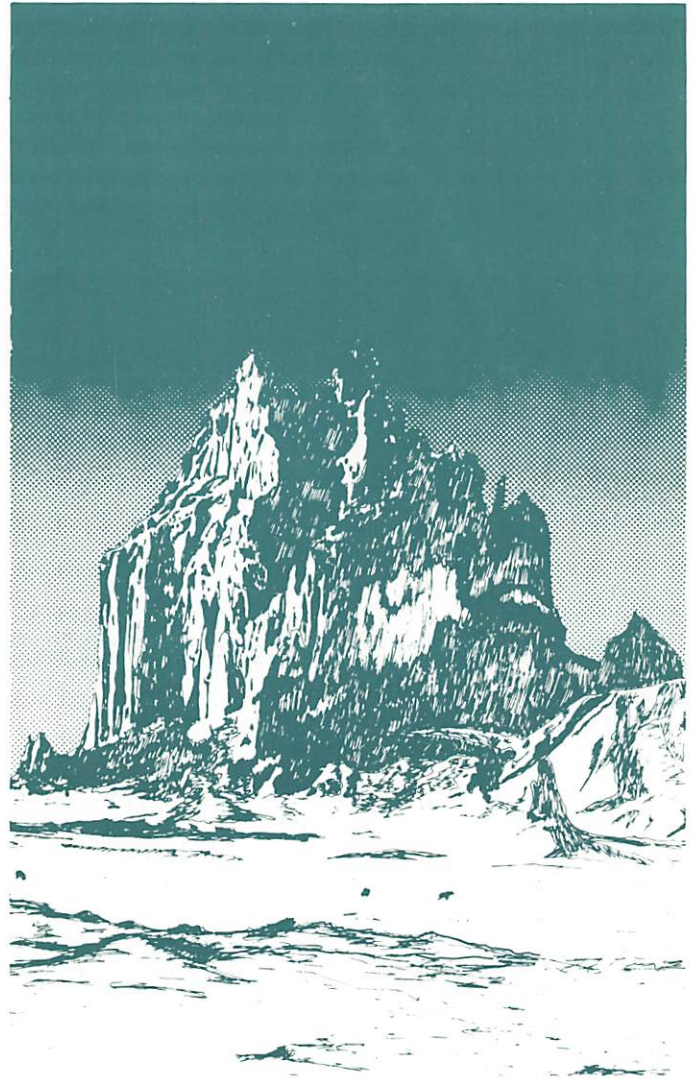
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
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# The National Natural Landmarks Program

U.S. Department  
of the Interior

Heritage Conservation  
and Recreation Service



# The National Natural Landmarks Program

The Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS) mission is to plan and coordinate the conservation of the nation's natural and cultural resources, and to assure adequate recreation opportunities for all its people. One major HCRS responsibility is to assist in conserving a variety of significant natural areas. This aim is realized through the identification and designation of National Natural Landmarks which are listed on the National Registry of Natural Landmarks.

America has a wealth of natural resources that constitute a rich and diverse natural heritage. National Natural Landmarks are true and representative examples of this natural heritage. 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 full range of ecological and geological features that constitute the nation's natural history, including terrestrial and aquatic communities, structures, materials and landforms that illustrate geological processes, fossil evidence of the development of life on earth, and habitats of rare or restricted native plant and animal species.

The Secretary of the Interior established the National Natural Landmarks Program in 1963. The program seeks to encourage preservation of areas that illustrate the ecological and geological character of the United States, to enhance the educational and scientific value of the areas 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 has been administered by HCRS since 1978.

## The Designation Process

HCRS conducts studies of ecological and geological features in the 33 natural regions of the United States, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and The Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands. These studies 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 an annotated list of areas recommended for National Natural Landmark status.

The recommended areas on the list are evaluated jointly by natural scientists and the appropriate HCRS regional office to assess each area's potential national significance. Their findings and suggestions are forwarded to the Service's Division of Natural Landmarks, where they are reviewed and ultimately submitted through the HCRS Director to the Secretary of the Interior for final approval and Landmark designation. The National Registry of Natural Landmarks is periodically published in the *Federal Register*.

## Conservation of Landmarks

Because they possess national significance in illustrating the nation's natural history, it is important that the qualities of National Natural Landmarks be preserved and protected. While landmark designation does recognize the significance of a natural area, it does not affect the ownership of lands so designated. But official recognition of an area in the National Registry of Natural Landmarks often stimulates an 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 detailing the effect of their actions on the environment, including National Natural Landmarks. In addition, HCRS prepares an annual report to the Congress, identifying National Natural Landmarks whose nationally significant values are damaged or threatened.

Following designation, each new landmark owner or manager is invited to enter into a voluntary agreement with HCRS to protect the landmark's nationally significant values. When this agreement is made, the owner relinquishes none of the rights and privileges for use of the land, and is eligible to receive a bronze plaque and a certificate which identify the area as a registered Natural Landmark.