

Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve

1,000 acres - Floyd County, Virginia

The Site: Widely recognized as one of Virginia's greatest natural heritage treasures, Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve is like no other place in the state. A variety of unusual conditions combine to make the preserve home to 14 plant species, three invertebrate species and six natural communities that are rare in Virginia. The property was purchased with funds from the Virginia Parks and Natural Areas Bond.

Natural History: At 3,971 feet, Buffalo Mountain's rounded summit stands well above the surrounding landscape and is subjected to sub-alpine winds and temperatures. Slight variations in exposure and soil depth create contrasting microclimates. These variable site conditions, in combination with soils high in magnesium, provide suitable habitat for specialized and unusual vegetation. Much of the summit supports grassy, prairie-like glade communities, which are home to a number of rarities. Among them are mountain sandwort (*Minuartia groenlandica*), plains frostweed (*Helianthemum bicknellii*) and mountain rattlesnake root (*Prenanthes roanensis*). Also in glades near the top of the mountain, lives an insect found nowhere else on earth – the Kosztarab's giant mealybug (*Puto kozstarabi*).

Along the south and southeast flanks of the mountain are natural openings in the forest with vegetation as intriguing as that on the summit. Each is a glade fringed with eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and supporting many native grasses. In late summer these glades have dazzling displays of wildflowers. Most impressive are purple blazing-star (*Liatris spicata*) and a seldom seen, brilliant flower called stiff goldenrod (*Oligoneuron rigidum* var. *rigidum*).

Near the southern base of the mountain, cool groundwater springs to the surface, forming unusual plant communities called mafic woodland seeps. These communities harbor Virginia's largest population of the globally rare large-leaved grass-of-parnassus (*Parnassia grandifolia*).

Cultural History: Buffalo Mountain was part of a large tract of land granted to Revolutionary War hero General Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee as a reward for his military service. The property passed on to his sons, Charles Carter Lee and Civil War General Robert E. Lee. Charles Carter Lee built a home near the base of the mountain and his former law office, a small log cabin, still stands on an adjoining piece of land.

Resource Management: Scientists continue to study the flora and fauna in the preserve and are developing plans to best manage them, including a prescribed fire program to maintain the glade communities. Because the habitats are sensitive, they are protected from human disturbance as much as possible. Public access improvements have recently been completed, including a gravel access road, a small parking area and a hiking trail to the summit.

Compatible Uses: Compatible uses include hiking, nature study and photography. Some uses are prohibited, including horseback riding, off-road vehicles, rock climbing, and collecting plants, animals and rocks. The natural communities at

the summit are particularly sensitive to trampling and are easily damaged by foot traffic. Please stay on marked trails and out of closed areas.

Location: The preserve is located in the southern corner of Floyd County.

From Floyd, travel southwest on U.S. Route 221 about 6 miles to Route 727. Turn left (south) on 727 and go about 6 miles to a low saddle in the ridge near the eastern slope of Buffalo Mountain. Turn right on the gravel access road. Go about 1 mile to the gravel parking area.

From the Blue Ridge Parkway, take Route 799 north about 1 ½ miles to Route 604. Turn left and go about 1 ½ miles to Route 727. Turn left and go about 1 mile to a low saddle in the ridge near the eastern slope of Buffalo Mountain. Turn right on the gravel access road. Go about 1 mile to the gravel parking area.

Natural Heritage Resources

Plants

plains frostweed (*Helianthemum bicknellii*) G5/S1
Appalachian fir clubmoss (*Huperzia appalachiana*) G4G5/S2
Gray's lily (*Lilium grayi*) G3/S2
bog twayblade (*Liparis loeselii*) G5/S2
mountain sandwort (*Minuartia groenlandica*) G5/S1
stiff goldenrod (*Oligoneuron rigidum* var. *rigidum*) G5T5/S2
large-leaved grass-of-parnassus (*Parnassia grandifolia*) G3G4/S2
bog bluegrass (*Poa paludigena*) G3/S2
mountain rattlesnake root (*Prenanthes roanensis*) G3/S2
alderleaf buckthorn (*Rhamnus alnifolia*) G5/S1
white beakrush (*Rhynchospora alba*) G5/S2
balsam ragwort (*Senecio pauperculus*) G5/S2
three-toothed cinquefoil (*Sibbaldiopsis tridentata*) G5/S2

Animals

a millipede (*Okeanobates americanus*) G4/S1
Kosztarab's giant mealybug (*Puto kozstarabi*) G1/S1
montane centipede (*Escaryus cryptorobius*) G2/S2

Communities

high elevation outcrop barren - 2 types - both G1/S1
low elevation basic outcrop barren G1/S1
mafic fen G1/S1
mafic woodland seep G2/S1
montane basic woodland G1/S1

For more information please contact:

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Richmond, VA 23219 (804) 786-7951
website: www.state.va.us/~dcr/vaher.html



Department of Conservation & Recreation

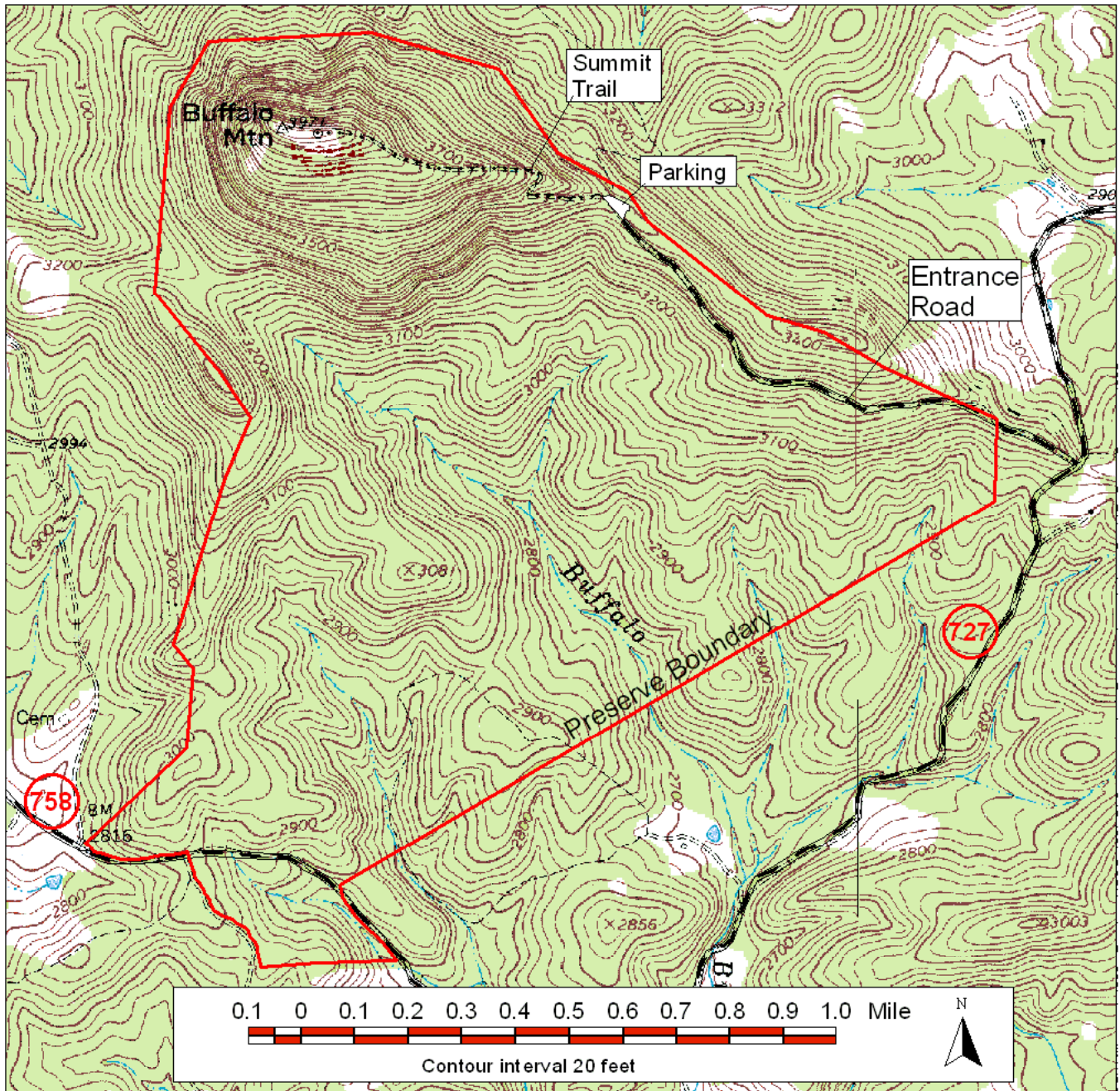
CONSERVING VIRGINIA'S NATURAL & RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

James S. Gilmore, III, Governor

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