

## About Buffalo Mountain

Buffalo Mountain was once the eastern frontier of the Cherokee Nation. After the American Revolution, these lands were granted to Lieutenant Colonel Henry “Lighthorse Harry” Lee as a reward for his military service. During the 19th and 20th centuries, small farmers living near Buffalo Mountain produced maize, apples, potatoes, buckwheat, and livestock such as pigs and chickens. Whiskey and brandy being easier to transport than grain or apples, were widely distilled and consumed. Prior to the arrival of the chestnut blight in the early 20th Century, chestnuts were widely harvested, sustaining people and wildlife alike.

Buffalo Mountain was protected with the support of The Nature Conservancy, Floyd County, and the 1992 Virginia Parks and Natural Areas Bond.



Three-toothed cinquefoil (*Sibbaldia tridentata*)

## The Natural Area Preserve System

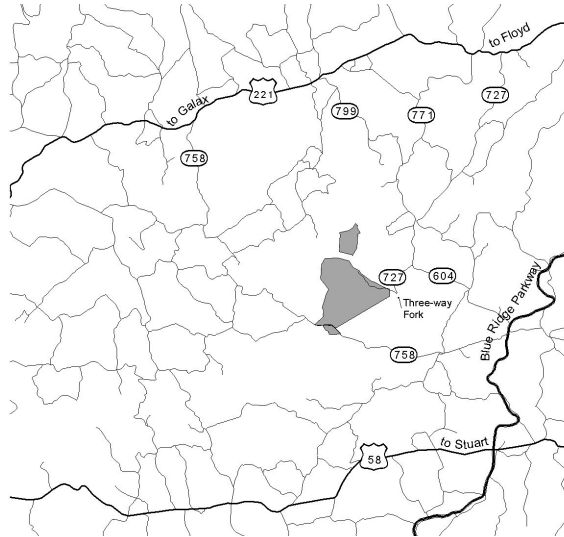
Natural Area Preserves are dedicated to protect habitat for rare and endangered plants, animals, and natural communities. There are 65 Natural Area Preserves protecting more than 58,000 acres statewide. While DCR provides public access at many preserves, recreation is secondary to resource protection. Preserves are open from sunrise to sunset unless otherwise posted. When you visit any preserve, please follow these guidelines so DCR can ensure the resources will be here for generations to come.

- No camping or fires
- Stay on marked trails
- No unleashed pets
- No bicycles, ATVs, or off-road vehicles
- No horses
- No collection of plants, animals, minerals or artifacts

## Directions to Buffalo Mountain

From Roanoke, follow I-81 south towards Christiansburg. Exit onto VA 8 and head south towards Floyd. At Floyd, turn right onto US 221, and follow it about 6 miles. Turn left (south) on 727 (Union School Road) and go about 4.5 miles to Conner Grove Road (VA 799). Turn right onto 799, go about 100 feet and turn left onto Moles Road (VA 727). Go about 1 mile, and turn right to stay on VA 727. Go 1 mile to a 3-way fork. Bear to the right and follow the gravel access road to the 10-car parking area. Park only in numbered spaces. **If the lot is full please wait for a space to open or come back another time.**

From Wytheville, follow I-77 south towards Galax. Merge onto US 221 north towards Hillsville/ Floyd. Follow US 221 about 15 miles to the town of Willis. Turn right onto VA 799 (Conner Grove Road). Follow VA 799 about 5 miles to VA 727. Turn right onto Moles Road (VA 727). Go about 1 mile, and turn right to stay on VA 727. Go 1 mile to a 3-way fork. Bear to the right and follow the gravel access road to the 10-car parking area. Park only in numbered spaces. **If the lot is full please wait for a space to open or come back another time.**



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# Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve



Buffalo Mountain summit

## Natural History

Widely recognized as one of Virginia's greatest natural heritage treasures, Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve is managed for the benefit of the native plants and animals that live here, and also provides a natural respite for the people who visit. The preserve is home to many species including 15 rare plants and 3 rare animals.

At 3,971 feet, Buffalo Mountain's rounded summit stands well above the surrounding landscape and is subjected to sub-alpine winds and temperatures. High, cool mountains such as this can serve as refugia for certain species during changing climate.

The rich diversity of Buffalo Mountain is largely explained by environmental variation in elevation, aspect, and soils which, combined, creates distinctive habitats. Much of the summit supports open, grassy, prairie-like communities, which are home to a number of rarities. Among them are mountain sandwort (*Minuartia groenlandica*) and three-toothed cinquefoil (*Sibbaldia tridentata*). Also in grassy glades near the top of the mountain, lives an insect found nowhere else on earth – the Buffalo Mountain mealybug (*Puto kosztarabi*).

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 (*Solidago rigida* var. *rigida*).

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*).

In 2007, the Oak Trail was constructed to the summit of Buffalo Mountain. The summit offers a stunning 360 degree view of the surrounding landscape. In 2019, the Ridge Trail was added, creating a loop hiking option. In 2020, the Barrens Loop Trail was built to protect fragile plant communities from trampling and soil erosion. Please do your part to protect the unique biodiversity at Buffalo Mountain and stay on marked trails at all times.

