

Dolly Sods Wilderness Expansion (Proposed)

Size: approx. 7,144 acres

Location: Tucker, Grant Counties

Watershed: Red Creek (Cheat)

USGS Topographic Map: Blackbird Knob,
Blackwater Falls

Elevation Range: 3600 – 4160 ft

Dominant Vegetation: Upland Brush, Maple

The existing Dolly Sods Wilderness would be expanded by adding approximately 7,144 acres, protecting most of the upper drainage of main fork and Left Fork of Red Creek. It is mostly in southeastern Tucker County, with small portions of adjacent Grant County. It would include all of Dolly Sods North, acquired by the Forest Service in 1993, and all of the Dolly Sods Scenic Area west of FS Rt. 75 except for the Red Creek

Campground and the area encircled by the Northland Loop Trail. Most of the area is a rolling plateau 3,600 to 4,160 feet above sea level - high altitude country for this part of the east - except at the southern end, where Red Creek descends into its canyon and the existing wilderness area. The Allegheny Front drops 2200 feet on the east, just outside the wilderness boundary. Cabin Mountain forms the western rim of the plateau.

Large expanses of grass, sedges, bogs with *Polytrichum* moss, and heath barrens with blueberries and huckleberries occupy portions of the plateau. Red Spruce are reclaiming other portions. The east side of Raven Ridge supports a maturing forest of Sugar Maple. Stands of American Beech grow elsewhere on upland portions. Views west from Cabin Mountain across the wild Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge are outstanding as are those to the east. Young spruce, “flagged” by the prevailing winds, grows between outcroppings of Homewood sandstone on Rocky Knob. Other stretches of Cabin Mountain are open grassland or covered by stands of Mountain Holly, a small tree. The flora is typical of sea level plant communities in southeastern Canada.

The Cheat Mountain Salamander, the West Virginia Northern Flying Squirrel and the Eastern Cougar are on the federal Endangered Species list. Dolly Sods is a “hot area” for alleged cougar sightings, but no confirming evidence has turned up. Snowshoe Hares and New England Cottontails, unusual in West Virginia, are common. Beavers have created “mini lakes” with their ponds. Upper Red Creek and its tributaries are naturally tea-colored by the many beaver dams and bogs. Downstream from its headwaters in the Dobbin Slashings Bog, Red Creek runs under slabs of sandstone.

Hikers and horseback riders have outstanding opportunity for “free and unconfined” exploration and solitude on an extensive network of unsigned trails. On the west side, managers and residents of Timberline Development and Ski Resort, which is contiguous with federal property on Cabin Mountain, have established a network of trails with the approval of the Forest Service. Backpackers will find excellent campsites along streams in the southern part of the area. Weather on Dolly Sods can be severe and changes rapidly. Dense fog banks often form. Snow and sleet can occur at any time of the year. Hikers and berry pickers often get lost. The hint of danger lends an element of excitement for well-prepared wilderness travelers



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