



Thomas Minney © The Nature Conservancy

Director's Message

I am thrilled to announce an outstanding achievement that highlights how we think about nature and economy coming together in our work—the protection of 1,143 acres in the Canaan Valley-Dolly Sods landscape, a vitally important section of the Central Appalachians. This stretch of land borders our popular Bear Rocks Preserve and stands as a testament to what we can accomplish when considering the way our land protection projects fit with local economies. Together, we are acting for a future where people and nature thrive. Projects like conserving these 1,143 acres along the Allegheny Front help position us for that future, where biologically diverse lands and tourism support integrated outcomes.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas Minney".

Thomas Minney
Executive Director
The Nature Conservancy
in West Virginia



Bear Rocks Preserve © Kent Mason

Allegheny Front Tract Protected!

Key land connector near Bear Rocks Preserve conserved

Stand on top of The Nature Conservancy's 477-acre Bear Rocks Preserve, and you'll be treated to some of the most breathtaking views in the Appalachian Mountains. High above Canaan Valley, this windswept expanse of the Dolly Sods landscape stretches out to the sky and imparts a sense of haunting beauty with its cool climate, rolling forests and forlorn boulders. Not only is it a popular West Virginia destination for visitors far and wide, but it also serves as the cornerstone for a diverse and resilient landscape—a landscape that the Conservancy has now taken further action to protect by acquiring 1,143 acres that border the preserve.

“This property, as a keystone in the Dolly Sods landscape, plays an immense role in the Central Appalachians' ability to promote tourism, provide drinking water to the eastern United States and stand as a resilient stronghold for people and wildlife,” says Thomas Minney, state director of the Conservancy in West Virginia. “Seeing this success come to fruition is a highlight and honor in my career. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

The 1,143-acre Allegheny Front tract is an essential section of the high-elevation Canaan Valley-Dolly Sods landscape. It plays a key role in securing the landscape's sweeping views and connecting some of the most biologically diverse and resilient forests in North America. A team of Conservancy scientists have identified the Central Appalachian landscape as one of the most critical landscapes for promoting species movement in response to climate pressures, and the Allegheny Front tract lies at the heart of a narrow corridor that can serve to interlock these vital forests together.

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Dolly Sods Wilderness © Kent Mason

The tract provides additional habitat to more than 26 rare and protected species that occur locally in the Dolly Sods plateau, ranging from the Cheat Mountain salamander to the snowshoe hare, and rests on the eastern Appalachian migratory flyway for raptors and other birds.

“While we are very much invested in the short- and long-term impacts this property has on the region’s ecological importance and resiliency, we are also focused on the substantial impact it has on our well-being and local economies,” adds Minney. “For instance, this property is the backdrop of one of the most photographed areas in the state—a popular destination for millions of urban Americans within a three-hour drive.”

By protecting a promising area for outdoor recreational opportunities in the Dolly Sods region, this project helps support tourism as a backbone for the surrounding counties’ economy in a community where hunting, fishing, hiking and other outdoor activities are an integral part of the culture.

The significance of the tract does not end with its economic and ecological value, though. It also contributes to the Central Appalachians’ relevance as the heart and lungs of the eastern United States. Because of the tract’s position on the Eastern Continental Divide, it feeds into headwaters of the Potomac River and major tributaries to the Ohio River, which affects the water quality of millions of downstream users, including cities such as Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. Coupled with the clean air supplied by the native red spruce forests in the region, the Allegheny Front tract helps sustain the air and water on which millions in West Virginia and beyond depend.

“This acquisition serves as an excellent example of how land conservation can contribute to a vision of a thriving future for people and nature, and I look forward to building on opportunities like this for West Virginia,” says Minney.

This project was made possible through significant contributions from supporters like Dave Montgomery and the Ann C. and Robert O. Orders Jr. Family Foundation.

NATURE WEST VIRGINIA



Black Bear © Kent Mason

Conserving for Generations

For more than 40 years, the late Joseph Rieffenberger showed his commitment to nature through his accomplished work as a wildlife biologist at the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. Known as “The Bear Man,” Rieffenberger was an active supporter of The Nature Conservancy and other conservation organizations and played a leading role in conserving West Virginia’s natural diversity through his research to restore black bear populations.

Now, thanks to his lasting dedication to nature, Rieffenberger’s values will live on for generations to come through a significant legacy gift to the Conservancy in West Virginia. The Conservancy is honored by the extraordinary actions of supporters like Joseph Rieffenberger who truly make a difference for future generations with their generosity and vision. We would like to sincerely thank all Legacy Club members and supporters who leave a gift through their will or estate plans to the Conservancy in West Virginia. You are protecting West Virginia’s lands and waters for tomorrow.

Go to [nature.org/legacy](https://www.nature.org/legacy) to learn more.