



Ellicott Rock Wilderness

Wilderness is a term used to describe special areas of federal land that have been set aside with some of the strongest protections provided to public land. US Congress designates these lands which are managed by one of four federal land agencies – US Forest Service, US Park Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

The 1964 Wilderness Act was passed by US Congress with only one dissenting vote. It established standards to allow the natural places to exist largely without human manipulation.

DEFINITION OF WILDERNESS

“A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is ... as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined [as] an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which [it] generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; [Wilderness] has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; [and] ... is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; [these areas] may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”

{Excerpt from the 1964 Wilderness Act}



Traditional tools are used to clear trails in Ellicott Rock Wilderness.

What does this mean for the public and public land managers? Both visitors and the government personnel managing Wilderness Areas have to do everything in their power to keep the areas as wild and natural as possible. Experiencing wilderness is best done in small groups. When camping, visitors should work to return their campsites to a point that the next visitors would have trouble seeing where others had camped. Mechanization is prohibited in Wilderness Areas so bicycles and chainsaws are against the rules. Even government employees must use non-motorized “Traditional” tools to clear trails here. Remember, in wilderness, humans are only a visitor.

Today, the National Wilderness Preservation System consists of 803 distinct wilderness areas in the United States with a total of more than 111 million acres.

Ellicott Rock Wilderness was congressionally designated as part of the Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975. Originally 3,600 acres, the area was expanded to roughly 8,300 acres in 1984. Ellicott Rock Wilderness is unique in that it is the only wilderness in the country that spans 3 states and 3 forests: Georgia (Chattahoochee National Forest), South Carolina (Sumter National Forest) and North Carolina (Nantahala National Forest). The largest portion of the Wilderness Area is located in North Carolina, but the majority of recreation pressure is in South Carolina. The Wilderness is also noteworthy as it is split into east and west halves by the Chattooga Wild & Scenic River, congressionally designated in 1974.

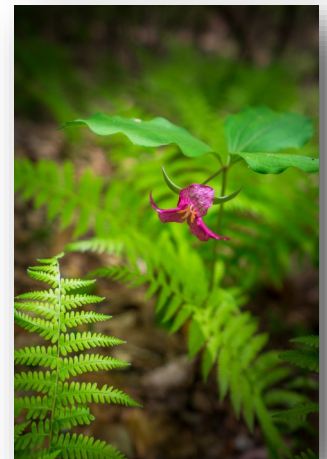


Ellicott's Rock marks the boundary between NC and GA.

In 1811, Major Andrew Ellicott, a well-respected surveyor, was hired by the state of Georgia to delineate the 35th latitude parallel, marking the boundary on a rock between North Carolina and Georgia. Today, the rock is known as Ellicott's Rock. As the story goes, the location Ellicott reported revealed the border was 18 miles south of where the state of Georgia claimed, working himself out of a paycheck. Two years later, a second commissioning crew was sent out for a re-survey, and located the 35th parallel to be only 15 feet from Ellicott's Rock. This rock is known as Commissioners Rock.

Ellicott Rock Wilderness is on the shoulder of the Appalachian Mountains. Here you will find abundant wildlife including red-eyed vireos, barred owls, raccoons, black bear and the native Brook Trout. The dominant tree species are Eastern Hemlock and White Pine in the lower elevations and Red and White Oak in the higher elevations. Rhododendron and Mountain Laurel thickets make great habitat for wildlife.

As special as this place is, there are threats to Ellicott Rock Wilderness. The woolly adelgid (a small aphid) is slowly killing off all the Eastern Hemlock trees. Large, dead trees are not hard to find along the river corridor. Because so many people enjoy visiting the area, there are many days of the year that there are too many people here for anyone to truly feel the Solitude that they should find in Wilderness. Visitors not abiding by the Leave No Trace principles are a threat the Natural quality of the Wilderness.



Rose Trillium along the Chattooga Hiking Trail.

Enjoy your visit to Ellicott Rock Wilderness. Make it a goal to visit as many of the 803 Wilderness that you can. While they are all special, they are all very unique.

More information can be found at wilderness.net