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National Park Service to consider new park in W.Va.

By [Paul J. Nyden](#)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Next month, the National Park Service will begin conducting a survey to determine if some areas within the Monongahela National Forest should be made into a national park - something West Virginia doesn't currently have.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., requested the survey, which is scheduled to be completed by September 2012.

On Monday, Manchin said he "is pleased that the National Park Service is undertaking this survey to evaluate whether this beautiful part of our state should be designated as a national park."

In a recent news release, the NPS said the survey would "determine whether the historic, natural and recreational resources in the project area are 'likely' or 'unlikely' to meet Congressionally-required criteria for a national park.

Judy Rodd, executive director of the group Friends of Blackwater Canyon, said the proposed High Allegheny National Park would be formed from "lands in the northern area of the Monongahela National Forest, which is already federal land," as well as Blackwater Falls and Canaan Valley state parks.

"It would not cost anything," Rodd said.

The new park would offer visitors a unique ecology, the chance to see a wide variety of beautiful and rare birds, as well as historical battlefields and forts from the Civil War era, Rodd said. Lands in the proposed park would also include those improved during the Great Depression, under projects run by the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps.

The proposed new national park would include lands east of Elkins, north to the towns of Thomas and Davis, east to Petersburg, and south to Seneca Rocks and Franklin.

The park could also include well-known sites such as Spruce Knob, Seneca Rocks, Blackwater

Falls, the Otter Creek Wilderness, Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Dolly Sods.

The headwaters of the Potomac, Monongahela and Greenbrier rivers would all be within the park. Recreational activities available to visitors could include hiking, biking, kayaking, skiing, horseback riding, rock climbing and spelunking.

Last year, T. Destry Jarvis, president of Outdoor Recreation and Park Services LLC, prepared a report given to Manchin that stated, "The High Allegheny Plateau, currently a portion of the Monongahela National Forest, is the best preserved and least 'developed' region of the state. ...

"The High Allegheny Plateau offers outstanding scenery, composed of nationally significant natural features and cultural sites, abundant wildlife and rare species of plants and animals -- as well as the hospitable, well-cared-for communities that offer the service amenities needed by the recreational visitors [and] tourists," Jarvis wrote.

"This would help put West Virginia on the map as a place to visit. It would be an economic engine for the highlands," said Rodd.

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