

High Point Restoration Project

The High Point Restoration Project began in 2015 in an effort to halt the degradation impacting the fragile vegetation communities along the Cliffs and restore them to a healthy and sustainable state.

The high, nearly vertical cliffs at Thoroughfare Gap, known as High Point, the White Rocks, are unique Piedmont features defined as monadnocks--an isolated ridge that rises above the surrounding landscape. This unique geological formation supports two unique plant communities: the Table-Mountain Pine—Oak/Heath Woodland, and the Piedmont/Mountain Acidic Cliff. Not only are both these communities uncommon in the Piedmont area, the population of table mountain pines along the Cliffs have become genetically isolated from their western relatives in the Blue Ridge, creating an entirely distinct population.

As visitor traffic increased over the years, several stresses began to materialize, including:

Soil Exposure - Without organic matter, nutrients are not returned to the soil, impacting plant populations; lack of organic matter leaves roots unprotected;

Vegetation reduction - Trampling, "pruning," and social trails destroyed a significant quantity of plants;

Vandalism - Trees were extensively carved and hacked with axes; graffiti began to frequently appear on rocks; rock climbing bolts erected on cliffs

During the initial recovery phase over the 2015 growing season, staff from Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, DCR Division of Natural Heritage, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, and Virginia Outdoors Foundation worked to:

- Assess damage to trees and tag each;
- Map and then obscure social trails;
- Create monitoring plots in areas of high damage;
- Create one reference plot in a relatively undisturbed area.



At the end of each growing season (late summer/early fall), the team analyzes the monitoring plots for species and coverage. The past two years have seen the slow return of "weedy" species. These are important first steps, as they begin to add organic matter back to the soil. The area remains closed to visitors and under restoration indefinitely.