



STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

OFFICE OF THE
SECRETARY

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GUIDELINES FOR NATURAL AREA SELECTION

Natural Area, as defined by the State of Delaware enabling legislation (Natural Areas Preservation System, 7 Del. Code, Chapter 73), shall mean an area of land or water, or both land and water, whether in public or private ownership, which either retains or has reestablished its natural character (although it need not be undisturbed), or has unusual flora or fauna, or has biotic, geological, scenic or archaeological features of scientific or educational value.

In selecting a state-recognized Natural Area the Office of Nature Preserves in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, in conjunction with the Delaware Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, State Historic Preservation Office, Delaware Geological Survey, and/or other appropriate resource professionals, evaluates a site based on the criteria below. Criteria are not in priority order.

Other considerations in addition to the specific criteria listed below include replication and viability (size, condition, and landscape context) of a proposed site. When considering a site for Natural Area designation, replication of features does not have to be a limiting factor. Natural Area boundaries will include the entire extent of the feature of concern and associated supporting features such as contiguous undisturbed natural communities, uninterrupted hydrologic connections, and any other components that support the conservation values of the Natural Area. The viability of a proposed site considers the prospects for continued existence of the natural, geological, archaeological, or cultural features at the preferred level of quality.

In addition to the obvious natural/geological/archaeological benefits of preserving a site through the Natural Areas Preservation System law, other benefits include opportunities for recreation, research, and educational activities in such areas. The law, in §7303, indicates that the Department shall acquire Nature Preserves for the purpose of scientific research, teaching opportunities, to promote recreational and cultural values, among other purposes; hereinafter, collectively known as supportive elements. These supportive elements would not be considered in and of themselves as appropriate singular criteria when identifying a site for Natural Area registration.

CRITERIA

1. Outstanding Vegetation Community/Habitat

Definition: A terrestrial or aquatic site that is a significant example of a rare or common type of vegetation community or habitat in Delaware.

Standards: Apply natural heritage methodology, including, but not limited to, the Ecological Integrity Assessment (EIA), to vegetation communities taking into consideration viability (size, condition, and landscape context). Only consider vegetation communities ranked "A" (excellent) or "B" (good). Vegetation communities found in areas surrounded by development may not qualify because the viability (i.e., landscape context) is poor.

Example: A rare vegetation community that has the complete assemblage of species

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expected and limited or no invasive species present.

- Sea level fen at Cherry Walk – Angola Neck Nature Preserve - it is globally rare and in excellent condition.
- Red Maple-Tussock Sedge Marsh – Doe Bridge Nature Preserve - only example of this community in Delaware.

2. Species Rarity

Definition: Identification of a plant or animal species ranked as an S1, S1B, S2, G1, G2, G3, T1, T2 as defined by natural heritage methodology, or federally listed as threatened or endangered, or listed as state endangered.

Standards: Apply natural heritage methodology on ranking element occurrences taking into consideration viability (size, condition, and landscape context). Only consider element occurrences ranked “A” (excellent) or “B” (good). Element occurrences found in powerline cuts and roadside ditches would not qualify because viability (i.e., landscape context) is poor.

Example:

- A globally rare butterfly found in Doe Bridge Nature Preserve.
- A federally listed species such as the piping plover found in Cape Henlopen State Park.

3. Outstanding Geological Features

Definition: Significant examples of dynamic land forms, exposure of paleogeologic features, subsurface outcrops or exposures, upland depressions, inland paleo- dunes and sand ridges, unique soil types, fossil beds, and marine deposits.

Standards: Size of feature, its landscape context and condition.

Example:

- Deep Cut along the C&D Canal – regionally unique exposure of four ancient geologic formations.
- Marl Pit – exemplary exposure of an unusual mineral, known as greensand (glauconite).

4. Outstanding Archaeological Features

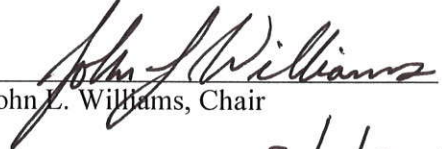
Definition: Significant examples of an archaeological site providing well-preserved evidence of distinct cultural phases or well-preserved evidence of human activities in specific environmental settings. Typically post-European contact structures are not considered.

Standards: Apply National Register of Historic Places (NPS <http://www.nps.gov/nr/>) criteria for evaluation of significance, taking into consideration integrity, size, historic context, and environmental setting.

Example: Archaeological sites located in undisturbed wooded settings on well drained ground adjacent to stream or stream confluences may qualify where the integrity of the environmental setting is high.

- Clyde Farm – Native American artifacts spanning nearly 7,000 years.
- Island Field Site – Prehistoric occupation and Native American burial ground.

Natural Areas Advisory Council


John L. Williams, Chair

Date Recommended: 3/2/2010

Department of Natural Resources and
Environmental Control


Collin P. O'Mara, Secretary

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