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# Sharing Almost Heaven with the World



**Shelley Moore Capito**  
United States Senate

Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) is the first female U.S. Senator in West Virginia's history. She is a member of the U.S. Senate Committees on Environment and Public Works; Commerce, Science and Transportation; Appropriations; and Rules and Administration.



**Joe Manchin**  
United States Senate

Senator Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) serves as West Virginia's senior senator. He chairs the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and is a member of the Appropriations, Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs committees.

**First designated as a National River in 1978, the New River Gorge is composed of approximately 72,000 acres of land along 53 miles of one of the world's oldest rivers – the New River – stretching from Bluestone Dam to Hawk's Nest Lake. More importantly, it is home to hiking trails, globally renowned rock-climbing formations, world-class whitewater rafting and remarkable hunting and fishing opportunities. Not to mention, the third tallest bridge in the United States – an iconic West Virginia image.**

Despite the endless outdoor recreation opportunities, the New River Gorge lacked the national recognition held by many similar recreation areas. After years of ongoing discussions and community involvement with a number of constituents, businesses, organizations and associations on this topic – everyone from sportsmen to economic development authorities to local entrepreneurs – the New River Gorge is finally being recognized as one of our country's most beautiful places with its new designation as a National Park and Preserve.

During a May 5, 2021 ceremony, the New River Gorge was officially dedicated as the 63rd National Park and the 20th Natural Preserve within the National Park Service.

Throughout the entire process, it was important to hear from our fellow West Virginians and those who would be impacted by this decision. We held numerous meetings, phone calls and town halls with constituents, businesses, organizations and associations. This was truly a collaborative effort and one that we are proud of.

The New River Gorge National Park is composed of four areas, totaling approximately 7,021 acres, including the Lower Gorge, Thurmond, Grandview and Sandstone Falls.

West Virginia has proud hunting and fishing traditions, and we were committed to ensuring that any final legislation would protect these

activities for generations to come. We succeeded in ensuring that 368 acres along the river in Grandview will be opened up for hunting for the first time ever, and 301 acres of the Lower Gorge will be kept open for hunting at the request of local sportsmen.

The approximately 65,165-acre National Preserve carries over the hunting and fishing regulations that were observed in its National River designation. In addition, the National Park Service is authorized to purchase over 3,700 acres from willing sellers of adjacent land for potential addition to the national preserve, allowing for the expansion of additional hunting opportunities and providing for improved public access into the preserve. While a very small percentage of the Park and Preserve – less than five percent – will have hunting restrictions, we succeeded in opening up hundreds of acres of fertile hunting ground.

But, it's not just the sportsmen who will benefit from this new designation.

With proximity to major metropolitan areas such as Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, Richmond, Charlotte and other major cities, the New River Gorge has the potential to attract new tourists and thrill seekers to the Gorge and the region as a whole.

The potential economic impact for surrounding communities and the entire state are boundless.



Those adventure lovers need West Virginia stores to buy their gear, they need West Virginia restaurants to eat at, West Virginia lodges to sleep at, and they need West Virginia guides to help them navigate the Gorge.

All of these things put money in the hands of hardworking West Virginians and back into our state's economy.

Another primary focus during this process was making sure the National Park contained some of the most sought-after views of the Gorge and highlighted the historical significance of the area, which we were successful in doing.

Whether it's the view from the Lower Gorge of the breathtaking New River Gorge Bridge, the historical town of Thurmond, the challenging and scenic trails in Grandview, or the waterfall views and unique botanical ecosystems that exist within Sandstone Falls, this National Park and Preserve showcases the best of West Virginia. This designation will allow more people to share in the wild and wonderful adventures West Virginians take so much pride in. The New River Gorge National Park and Preserve will be treasured and enjoyed for generations to come.

As West Virginians, we all know that the New River Gorge is perhaps the best-known landmark in West Virginia because of its breathtaking natural beauty and elements of unique Appalachian history and culture. Now, the rest of the nation – and world – will know it, too. 

