Bad Branch State Nature Preserve contains over 2,500 acres of forested slopes surrounding several deep, rugged gorges on the south face of Pine Mountain in southeastern Letcher County. A 60-foot waterfall that plunges over a sandstone cliff into a jumble of massive boulders crowns the natural beauty of the preserve. The preserve was acquired to protect habitat that supports more than thirty species of rare flora and fauna.

Bad Branch, noted for its excellent water quality, flows south past hemlock- and rhododendron-lined banks to the Poor Fork of the Cumberland River at the mouth of the hollow. Because of its pristine condition the stream was designated as a state wild river in 1986. The cold mountain stream and the narrow, shaded gorges help to maintain the necessary conditions to support a large assemblage of species more typical of northern climates or higher elevations. Among these rare species are small enchanter's nightshade, Fraser's sedge, painted trillium, and longtail shrew. Black bears pass through this area and Kentucky's only known nesting pair of common ravens is found along the sandstone cliffs at Bad Branch SNP.

The trail to the falls takes you through Bad Branch gorge, following the remains of an old logging road that was built when the forest was originally cut in the 1940's. A few of the massive old growth hemlocks that were spared from the crosscut saw tower above the second growth trees. An abundance of wildflowers graces the trailside in spring. As the moderately strenuous trail narrows, numerous ferns and delicate mosses growing on the boulders that line the trail can be viewed at eye level. The trail becomes steeper as it approaches the 100-foot high sandstone cliffs.

The waterfall can be heard long before it comes into view. Its power is spectacular after a heavy rain, but the dramatic ice formations observable during the winter and the delicate cascade of mid-summer also display the beauty of the falls.

For the more adventuresome hiker, the upper gorge loop trail continues over strenuous terrain, following a tributary for several miles and extending through a mountain pass known as Ran Polly Gap. Early travelers used this crossing when they needed to transport supplies to Whitesburg on the north side of Pine Mountain. The trail then continues to High Rock, an expansive sandstone outcrop extending along the mountaintop. From here one can get a spectacular view of the Cumberland Plateau and Black Mountain. It is also a great place to watch hawks as they migrate each fall along the mountain crest.

Due to the rugged terrain, easily eroded slopes, and possible encounters with venomous snakes, visitors are requested to remain on the trail. The preserve is open from sunrise to sunset for foot traffic and passive recreation. Horses, pets, mountain biking, rock climbing, camping, and picnicking are not allowed.

The Pine Mountain Trail passes through the preserve along the crest and upper slopes of the mountain. Hikers are reminded that they must through hike three miles on the preserve and follow all preserve rules. Overnight parking is prohibited.

The Commission's initial purchase was 435 acres from the Kentucky Chapter of The Nature Conservancy in 1985. Since that time, the Commission has added acreage in adjoining Slick Rock and Presley House Branches. A small portion of this addition lies on the steep, rich north slope of the mountain. The Nature Conservancy retains ownership of 1,088 acres which protect the upper gorge of Bad Branch. This portion of the preserve was dedicated by KSNPC on March 4, 1992.

Owners/Managers:
* Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission
* The Nature Conservancy

Purchased with Assistance of:
* Land & Conservation Fund
* Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund

For more information please contact:
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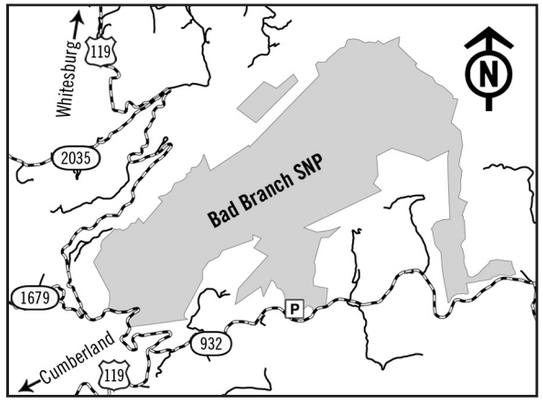
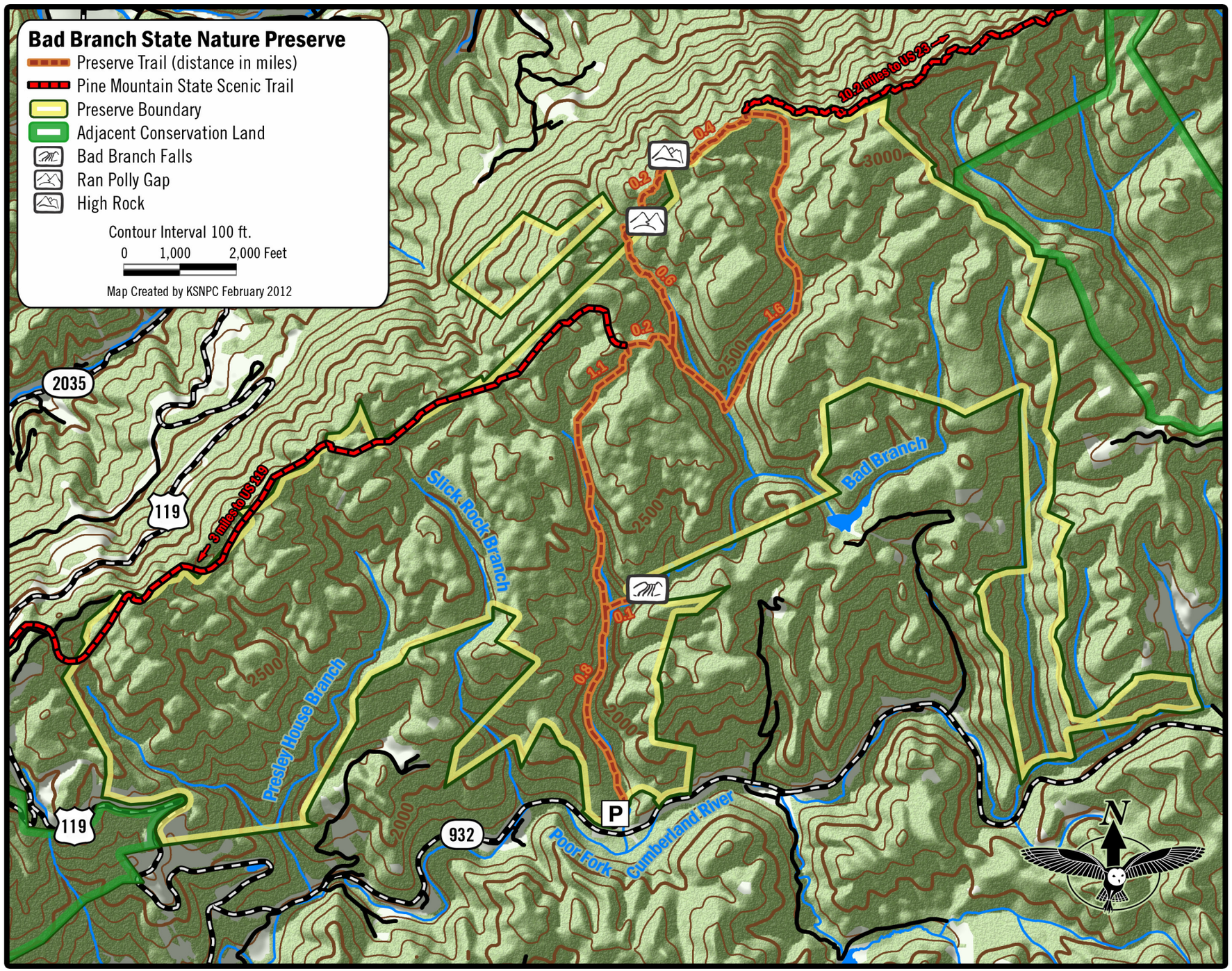
cover artwork by Ann DiSalvo

Bad Branch
State Nature Preserve



From the junction of KY 15 and US 119 in Whitesburg, follow US 119 south 8.0 miles. Turn left at junction with KY 932 and travel east for 2.0 miles to gravel parking area on left side of KY 932.

By observing the rules for State Nature Preserves, you will be helping to protect Kentucky's natural heritage.

1. Preserves are open sunrise to sunset.
2. Trails are open to foot traffic only. The established trail system provides you with the safest and best way to travel through the preserve. Visitors must not re-route or shortcut the existing trail system.
3. Horses, bicycles, climbing and rappelling are not permitted in nature preserves because of their destructive impacts to the trails and natural features.
4. Motorized vehicles are not permitted.
5. Possession of drugs or alcohol is prohibited.
6. Collecting plants, animals, rocks, artifacts or wood reduces those things that are needed to maintain nature's delicate balance. Therefore, collecting, hunting and trapping are prohibited on dedicated state nature preserves.
7. To ensure the natural beauty of each preserve and to promote visitor safety and enjoyment, camping, picnicking, building fires, audio equipment and pets are not permitted.
8. Remember to carry out your trash.

THESE RULES ARE ESTABLISHED BY 400 KAR 2:090. ANY PERSON IN VIOLATION OF THIS REGULATION MAY BE LIABLE FOR A CIVIL PENALTY OF $1000 PER DAY AND POSSIBLE CRIMINAL PROSECUTION AS PROVIDED FOR IN KRS 224.