

Canoeing the Broadkill River

The Broadkill River meanders eastward through the heart of Sussex County to the Delaware Bay. The watershed possesses a remarkable heritage of forested uplands and lush wetlands. Streamside forests serve important ecological functions: providing wildlife habitat, filtering storm water runoff and stabilizing riverbanks with vast root systems.

Some of Delaware's most distinctive habitats and plant species can be found here. Canoeing along the Broadkill offers a unique perspective on this important river corridor. Mixed hardwood and cedar forest line the riverbanks, flanked by a mosaic of agricultural lands. Large red maple, blackgum, sweetgum, loblolly pine, and the occasional Atlantic white cedar overhang the riverbanks. Their brilliant fall foliage is a delight. Paddling the river on a foggy early spring morning brings an entirely new experience: one filled with quiet and mystery around every bend.

Keen eyes will pick out largemouth bass, bluegill, and, in the spring, migrating river herring as the surface-feeding fish seek out insects. The majestic Great Blue Heron, with its pale blue-gray color, sharp bill, long legs, and six-foot wingspan, is hard to miss as it glides above the river. In the spring and early summer, watch for the golden head and breast of the Prothonotary Warbler perching on riverbank tree limbs. In spring, listen for the distinctive croak of the green frog, twanging like a loose banjo string. This frog depends on shallow freshwater habitats along the Broadkill River.

Close to the preserve, the character of the river landscape begins to shift. Freshwater tidal marshes and scrub-shrub wetlands form broad transition zones between the river and its forested banks. The globally rare seaside alder is found here. In autumn, while in flower, seaside alder is readily discernible from its common associate, smooth alder. Most of the world's population of seaside alder is found on the Delmarva peninsula.

Approximately two miles downriver of the put-in at Milton Memorial Park, look for the McCabe Preserve dock on the south side (right bank) of the river. The floating dock is only for use by non-motorized watercraft like kayaks and canoes.

Habitats Along the Broadkill and at the Edward H. McCabe Preserve

Several distinct habitat types are found along the Broadkill River and at the McCabe Preserve.

Tidal marsh and scrub-shrub wetlands: Adjacent to the open water of the river, emergent tidal marshes are regularly flooded, creating diverse habitats dominated by flowering herbs and sedges, including marsh mallow, arrow arum, pickerel-weed, broad-leaved arrowhead, and tear-thumb. Moving away from the river's edge, a subtle rise in elevation finds emergent marsh transitioning into scrub-shrub wetlands. Seaside and common alder, swamp rose, arrowwood, and buttonbush characterize these wetlands.

Swamp forests: Just barely inland from the tidal marsh and associated wetlands, with higher elevation, narrow bottomland swamp forests occur at the base of the slopes leading to upland forests. Red maple, blackgum, and lob-lolly pine survive the oxygen-depleted swamp soils by growing on mounded hummocks. Long prized and logged for its durability, Atlantic white cedar is identified by its reddish brown, fibrous trunk, conical crown, and evergreen scale-like leaves. The swamp understory harbors fragrant bayberry bushes, spectacular spring-blooming wild azaleas, and sweet pepperbush, with delicately scented, five-petaled white flowers blooming in late summer.

Upland forests: Inland from swampy forests, growing on steep slopes, gently rolling hills, and the level flats of McCabe, this habitat is dominated by species typical of upland forests in Sussex County. American beech, white oak, red oak, sweetgum, tuliptree, and loblolly pine dominate the landscape. Across the Preserve, one encounters upland forests of various ages. Nearest to the parking lot, forests are very young, while older stands of trees are found north of the canoe dock. These various age classes of forest give insight into the history of McCabe. Like most upland forests in Delmarva, logging was a primary activity for many years following European settlement. Farming soon replaced logging on many tracts of land. In numerous locations, about 50 years ago, farm activities ceased and forests were allowed to reclaim their rightful place in the landscape.

What is The Nature Conservancy?

The Nature Conservancy is a leading international nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters upon which all life depends. You will find us working in more than 72 countries, all 50 states, and in your backyard.

Since its inception in 1951, the Conservancy and its one million members have helped protect more than 119 million acres of land around the world, including more than 30,000 acres in Delaware alone.

The Pennsylvania & Delaware chapter owns and manages the Edward H. McCabe Preserve and 5 other natural preserves around the state, totaling more than 5,000 acres. Learn more about our preserves at nature.org/DEpreserves

Support our work: To become a member of The Nature Conservancy, please visit nature.org/member. To support our work here in Delaware, visit nature.org/DEgiving.

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EXPLORE NATURE ON FOOT OR BY CANOE/KAYAK

Edward H. McCabe Preserve and Town of Milton-McCabe Greenway Trail

Milton, Delaware



The Nature Conservancy
Pennsylvania & Delaware

On cover: Pink lady slipper orchids
Inside: Monarch butterfly © Susan Johnson Carlson;
Raccoon © Susan Johnson Carlson

nature.org/mccabe

Canoeing or Kayaking into McCabe:

The Milton-McCabe Preserve Greenway Trail

The Milton-McCabe Preserve Greenway Trail links the historic town of Milton with the Nature Conservancy's Edward H. McCabe Preserve. The canoe trail parking area and put-in is located at the Milton Memorial Park in Milton, Delaware. A kiosk with information about the greenway and the McCabe Preserve is located near the boat ramp. From the Milton Memorial Park boat launch, the canoe trail winds two miles down the Broadkill River into the preserve, where it joins with hiking trails. Look for the canoe dock on the south side of the river.

Greenway Trail Guidelines:

- The floating dock at McCabe Preserve is only for us by non-motorized vessels like canoes and kayaks.
- Always wear life preservers.
- Swimming and fishing are not allowed from the shore or the dock.
- Avoid the center of the river, which is the channel used by motorized boats.
- Do not land canoes at private boat docks.
- Please take your trash with you.
- The preserve is open for use from dawn to dusk.
- Please stay on the trails and check for ticks after visiting.

When visiting the McCabe Preserve:

- Take precautions against ticks, mosquitoes, chiggers, and sunburn. Watch for poison ivy.
- Motorized vehicles, ATVs, bicycles, horses, alcohol and firearms are prohibited.
- Leashed dogs are allowed; you must bag waste and take it with you.
- Remove all litter from the preserve.
- Do not feed or disturb wildlife.
- No hunting, trapping, fishing, picking or removal of plants, animals or other artifacts is permitted.
- No swimming, camping, smoking or fires are allowed.
- **Private parties/events, loud music, BBQ's/grills are strictly prohibited.**

Hiking the McCabe Preserve Trails

For those arriving by land, access to the trails at the Edward H. McCabe Preserve is from Round Pole Bridge Road utilizing our visitors' parking lot. A walk through all the trails at McCabe will traverse almost 3 miles of rolling hillsides and level uplands with numerous views of the Broadkill River and associated swampy wetlands.

Bennetts' Walk, named for Chris and Karen Bennett who developed the bird list for the Preserve, begins by taking you through several sections of young forests which are slowly developing into more mature woodlands like those found in the northern portions of this trail.

Julie's Jaunt offers a bench located on a small spur that overlooks a portion of tidal marsh where waterfowl and wading birds are often seen.

Ryan's Ramble meanders through a maturing forest dominated by hardwood species like white oak, red oak and tulip poplar.

Wildflower meadow: To the left of the kiosk at the trailhead you'll find a crushed stone pathway winding through a native wildflower meadow. This short path of approximately 1/10th of a mile is perfect for small children and people with limited mobility. Spring and summer are the best times to observe the blooming wildflowers (including coreopsis, milkweed and black-eyed susans) and the birds and pollinators that they attract. Eastern bluebirds can often be seen perched on the power lines nearby.

Reforestation trail: This flat, crushed stone trail goes through the reforestation area, planted in 2019. The trailhead is to the right of the parking lot and connects to the rest of the trail system.

Picnic table: A picnic table near the dock is a great place to enjoy a bite to eat while taking in the river views. Bald eagles, belted kingfishers and osprey (from spring to late summer) are commonly seen along this portion of the Broadkill. McCabe Preserve is a carry-in/carry-out park so please take your trash with you.



Directions to the Hiking Trails at the Edward H. McCabe Preserve:

The head of the hiking trail at the Edward H. McCabe Preserve is located east of Milton on Round Pole Bridge Rd. *GPS coordinates: N38°46'27.6", W75°17'00.7"*

From the town of Milton (10 min.): From Chandler Street, turn left on Federal Street (SR 5) and go south for 0.3 miles, following the sharp bend to the right at the center of town. Turn left on Wharton Street (turns into Atlantic Street). Follow for 1.5 miles. Turn left on Round Pole Bridge Road (County Road 257). Follow for 0.6 miles and look for the Preserve parking lot on the left.

From Wilmington, DE (approx. 1.5 hours): Follow SR1 South. Turn right on Hudson Road (County Road 258), which is immediately south of the bridge over Broadkill River. Take the first right on Round Pole Bridge Road. Follow for 2.9 miles and look for the Preserve parking lot on the right.

From the Beach (approx. 20-30 min.): Follow SR1 north approximately 3 miles. Turn left on Cave Neck Road (County Road 88). Turn right on Round Pole Bridge Road. Follow for 0.8 miles and look for the Preserve parking lot on the left.

From Washington/Baltimore (approx. 2.5 hours): Follow U.S. Route 50 east across the Bay Bridge. Turn left (east) on SR 404. Before reaching Bridgeville, turn left on SR 16 heading northeast toward Greenwood. Follow SR 16 past Route 13 and Route 113 until you reach SR 1 and turn right (south). Turn right on Hudson Road, which is immediately south of the bridge over the Broadkill River. Take the first right on Round Pole Bridge Road. Follow for 2.9 miles and look for the Preserve parking lot on the right.

