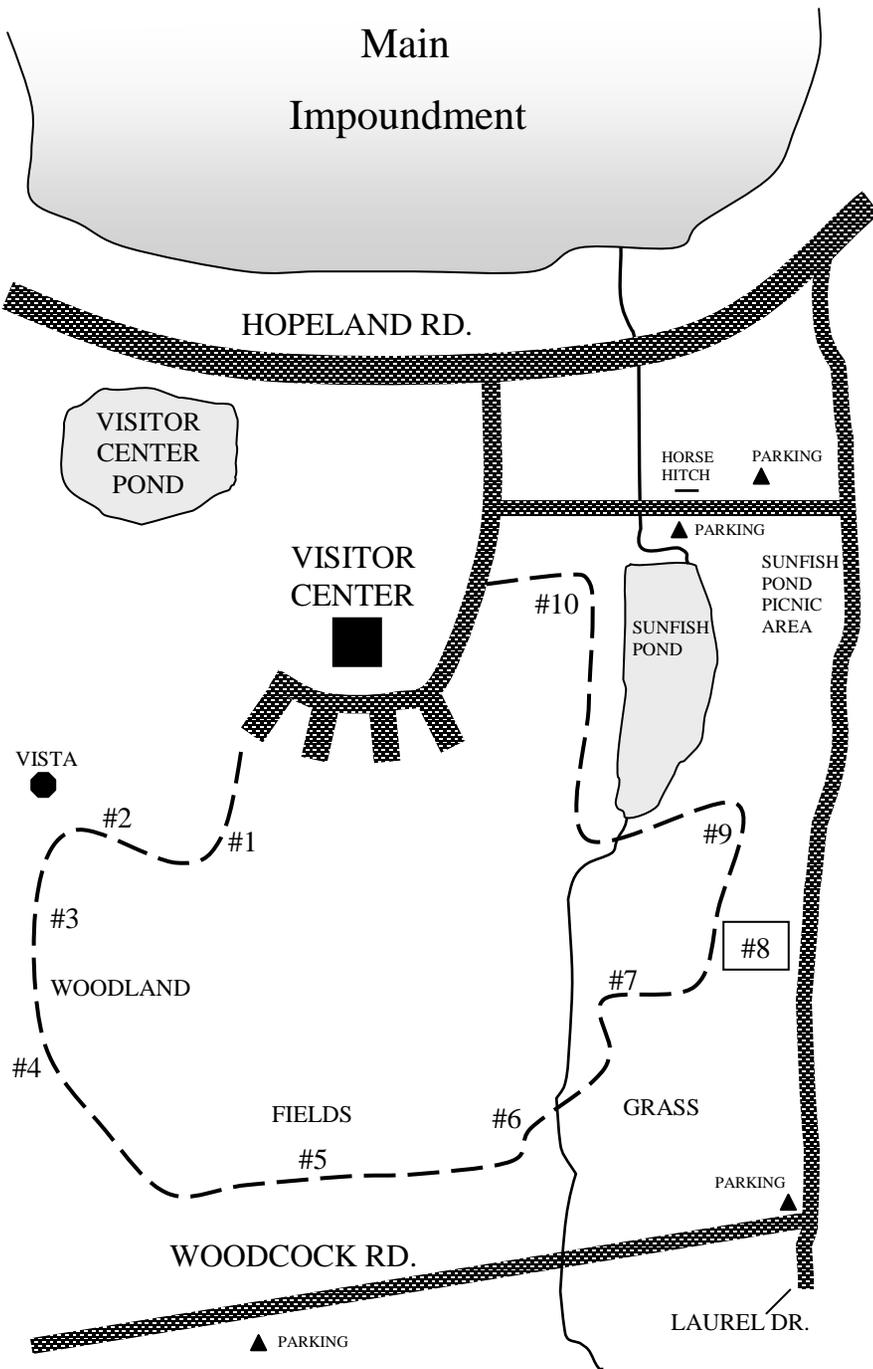


# MIDDLE CREEK CONSERVATION TRAIL GUIDE



Pennsylvania Game Commission  
Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area  
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## PLEASE NOTE

During legally prescribed hunting and trapping seasons, the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area is open to these activities as posted and regulated by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The Conservation Trail is about 1.4 miles in length and requires about 45 minutes of hiking time. Some of the trees along the trail are labeled with their common and scientific names. Several wooden footbridges span wet areas and ten points of interest are indicated by yellow markers with a number. These points of interest are explained below. The starting point is the Visitor's Center (See Map). Parking is available at the Visitor's Center. The trail starts at the end of Parking Lot #4.

Please help to keep the trail enjoyable for others by taking nothing but pictures and leaving nothing but footprints. The removal of wildflowers, vines, trees and shrubs is prohibited on State Game Lands. Thank you for your cooperation. We hope you have a pleasant hike.

## POINTS OF INTEREST

1. The trail begins at the forest and the edge of the food plot. You will notice two management practices in this area. First, you will notice an area planted with the Game Commission's Food Plot mix. This mixture consists of Dwarf Sunflower, Buckwheat, Sorghum and Millet. This mixture provides both food and cover for wildlife that often lasts well into the winter months. This mixture is available from the Game Commission each spring at a nominal fee. The second management practice can be observed where the field and forest meet. This practice is called woodland border cutting. The trees bordering the field are felled 30 to 50 feet into the woodland. This cut area then provides a very important "edge" for wildlife. The cut trees provide important cover for wildlife as well as winter browse. The cut area will regenerate with important food producing species such as Sumac, Raspberry and Blackberry. Borders need to be cut every five to seven years to regenerate the edge.

2. The vista point offers an excellent view of the Visitor's Center and the large water impoundment. The islands are used as nesting and resting areas for waterfowl. Some dead trees are standing in the impoundment and provide important nesting habitats for a wide variety of birds such as Wood Ducks and Black-Crowned Night Herons.

3. A regeneration harvest like the one before you provides benefits for wildlife in many ways. Seed trees, den trees, and wildlife snags are left standing on the site for wildlife and additional seed for the start of the new forest. Tops from the felled trees provide nesting and escape cover for wildlife as well as protection for the young growing trees. Regeneration harvesting is an important forest management tool. The forest floor is exposed to direct sunlight which promotes the rapid growth of new seedlings as well as flowers and forest shrubs. Tree species which need direct sunlight to grow and survive are best established and flourish by this system of forest management.

4. This one acre timber stand improvement harvest is an important first step in the proper management of the forest. Removing a portion of the trees allows more sunlight to reach the forest floor, thereby stimulating the growth of new tree seedlings and herbaceous plants. Some of the less desirable trees, along with trees growing too close to each other are removed to improve the health of the forest and promote better tree growth. Wildlife will benefit from the newly established growth in the forest. Notice the young tree seedlings and stump sprouts growing in the areas receiving the sunlight. In the adjacent block, all the trees marked with red paint illustrate a timber stand improvement harvest. All the red marked trees would be harvested to provide the same benefits for wildlife and the forest.

5. As you continue along the trail, you will notice a series of small fields which are separated

by hedgerows consisting of Multiflora Rose, Autumn Olive, Honeysuckle, Raspberry and Blackberry. These fields are planted with a variety of grains such as Sorghum, Corn, Sunflower and Buckwheat. Each year, some fields will be left idle to provide nesting cover for a wide variety of species. The hedgerows between the fields provide both food and cover for wildlife. These areas are extremely important in the winter months during snow cover. The hedgerows must be mowed periodically to maintain the important low ground cover.

6. As you walk across the wet ground surrounding the trail, you will notice this is a forested wetland. Pin Oak and Red Maple are two tree species commonly found in sites of this nature. Note the elevated root systems at the base of the trees. The stream and surrounding low-lying area absorbs and retains large quantities of runoff during times of heavy rain. The water is slowly released from the site to return to the stream after the passage of the storm. Sediment in the floodwater is deposited on the lowlands adjacent to the stream. These are some of the most fertile growing sites in the world. Many species of wildlife are dependant upon wetland habitat for their survival. The Wood Duck and Raccoon are two excellent examples.

7. The trail now passes through an old plantation of Scotch Pines. This area demonstrates the continual change that wildlife habitats undergo. This change is called ecological succession and is the natural aging process for habitats. The Scotch Pines are dying and they are being replaced by various shrubs and hardwoods. Without any type of disturbance to the habitat such as a wildfire or insect destruction, the trees will mature and succession will continue. If succession is interrupted, the habitat will respond with new growth and succession will begin again. As habitat changes, the wildlife species that live in an area also changes. Succession of habitat and the interaction with wildlife populations is a continually changing dynamic process.

8. Wildlife will benefit from this forest opening and surrounding woodland border cut. Many species of wildlife are attracted to this location for the grass/clover mixture which provides an excellent source of food. Birds of the forest will utilize the woodland border or unmowed portion of the field for nesting and rearing of their young. A hen turkey with her brood of young birds would be attracted to this field as they seek their preferred diet, the grasshopper. White-tailed deer will graze upon the rich grasses throughout the year. With the planting of fruit-producing shrubs such as the Crabapple and Sawtooth Oak, additional wildlife species will make use of the forest opening.

9. The trail crosses a rock outcropping created by erosion when the soil was washed to the bottom of the valley many years ago. Some of the rocks are covered with a light green substance called Lichen. Lichen is a combination of two organisms; fungus and algae. The fungus is the supporting structure for the plant, and the algae supplies the food. This cooperating relationship between two living things is called mutualism. A forest stand of Oak, Maple, Hickory and Tulip Poplar surround the trail. As you continue your hike, you will cross a series of footbridges through the wetland area. As you leave the wooded area, you will turn to the right and walk through the grassy area in the direction of Sunfish Pond.

10. At the pond, you will notice several waterfowl nesting structures. (Some may be well camouflaged or hidden toward the back of the pond.) These structures increase the nesting success for many species of waterfowl. Ponds, marshes and other wetlands of Middle Creek provide critical habitat to a wide variety of plants and wildlife. From Sunfish Pond, continue towards the Visitor's Center and the end of your hike on the Conservation Trail. The Game Commission is extremely proud of the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area, and we hope you have enjoyed your time spent here.