

Cedar Swamp Trail Walk

Douglas State Forest

SELF-GUIDED INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

Welcome

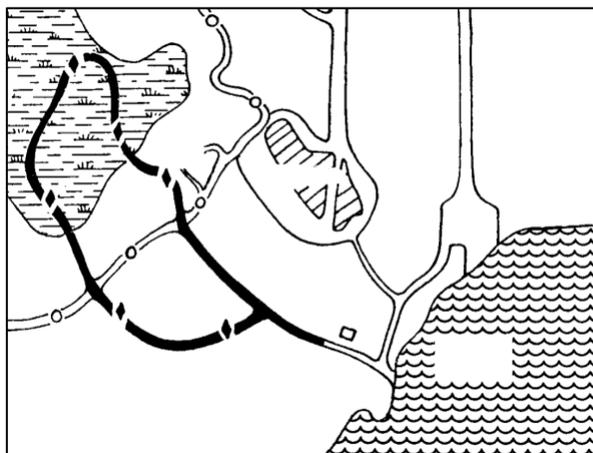
For hundreds of years, people considered wetlands as a wasteland needing to be “reclaimed.” Since the middle of the 18th century, we have lost over 15,000 acres of wetlands in Massachusetts (an area the same size as Manhattan). During this time, people sought to use both the land and the resources in it. Today, we recognize the value of wetlands for watershed protection and as a home for plants and animals.



About the Trail

This hike takes you into the mysterious world of an Atlantic white-cedar swamp. Red diamond blazes mark the trail, and numbered posts correspond to the text in the brochure. Please help protect this fragile ecosystem by staying on the trail boardwalk. If you can pick up any litter left behind by others, we appreciate the help.

The trailhead for the Cedar Swamp Trail is located at 107 Wallum Lake Road, Douglas, MA 01516. The trailhead can be accessed by following the gravel service road through the waterfront picnic area past the restroom building. Look for trailhead signs on your left.



The trail is relatively **easy** for hiking and is approximately **.5 miles**. The trail has a couple of steep and rocky sections and is narrow in places. Plan on spending about **30 minutes** hiking at a moderate pace, not counting any stops you make.

Follow the red trail blazes and signage at intersections.

- **For foot traffic only.**
- Please stay on designated trails.
- Leave only footprints take only pictures.
- Observe all posted rules and regulations.
- Be aware of hunting seasons and wear blaze orange when appropriate.

1) Typical New England Mixed Hardwood Forest

As you walk towards the cedar swamp, you are traveling through a typical New England mixed hardwood forest. When you enter the cedar swamp, the environment will transform, so pay attention to what you see in this area so you can contrast it with what you find in the cedar swamp. Look at the trees, and what is on the ground so you can compare it to what you see once you enter the cedar swamp.

2) Granite Quarry

Between 1893 and 1906, men quarried stone from this rocky area. This may not seem to have a direct connection to the cedar swamp, but there is one. Thousands of years ago, the glaciers retreated from this area. This left the ledges exposed where one day people could quarry them. Besides scouring the earth, the glacier also created depressions in the ground, called kettles. Some of these kettles later turned into cedar swamps.

3) Transition

This area marks the end of the mixed hardwood forest. You are now entering the beginning of the swamp habitat. Here, Atlantic White Cedar and Hemlock trees replace the Oak, Maple, Birch, Beech, and Ash you have seen so far. The thick growth of these evergreens allows little light to reach the forest floor. This keeps out all but the most shade-loving vegetation. Ironically, the Atlantic White Cedar tree is not a shade loving tree. Without help from nature, over time they will be replaced by Red Maples.



4) Sphagnum Moss

With less light coming through the canopy, and the area being wetter, you will now see different plants. The green, spongy carpet by your feet is sphagnum or “peat” moss. You will only see this moss in a swampy area like this one. Because it can hold so much water (16 to 26 times its dry weight), as it grows it manipulates the landscape, forming larger mires – a stretch of swampy or boggy ground.



5) Animal Homes

After a tree dies, it still remains a vital part of the forest. Look closely at this tree and you will see small holes and insect “trails.” These are evidence that it has served as a shelter and source of food for insects. Further up, you will see larger holes that are the work of woodpeckers in search of a meal. These larger holes can serve as nesting cavities for birds and other animals.

6) Nature's Fury

In December of 1996, a heavy snowstorm blanketed the area, bending the trunks of these trees. Unfortunately, it struck before the swamp froze. The roots of the cedar trees do not go deep, and the weight of the snow forced them from the ground, uprooting them.

While this seems bad, events like this snowstorm and wildfires are actually good for the forest. By removing trees, they let light through to the forest floor. This allows the next generation of Atlantic White Cedar trees to grow.

7) Indigenous Peoples & Cedar Swamps

The forest does not only provide a home to different plants and animals. It also provides materials for humans to build homes. The indigenous peoples used these trees to construct the frames of their Weekuws due to their resistance to rot. To furnish the houses, they used the inner bark to weave baskets and mats.



8) Skunk Cabbage

Another plant that you will not see in a hardwood forest is the Skunk Cabbage. Look for a large green plant with wide leaves. Skunk cabbages raise the temperature of their flowers to as high as 71 degrees. This allows it to bloom through snow and ice, earlier in the spring than most plants.



9) Wildlife

As you continue your walk through the forest, you may have noticed another change. Dry, rocky soil has replaced the damp sphagnum moss. The cedars have given way to mountain laurel and hemlock trees. Bear, deer, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, foxes, snakes, and a variety of birds are common inhabitants here. Look on the ground for their tracks and scat. On the lower branches of trees and plants, you may see signs of browsing.

10) Glacial Erratics

Another mark of the glacier that formed this are these rocks that you see strewn about. These are glacial erratics. As the great sheet of ice moved forward, it scraped the earth's surface. This action picked up debris, including boulders like these. As the ice melted, and the glaciers retreated, it left them behind.

11) Cinnamon Fern

Another common type of undergrowth in swamps are ferns. Ferns thrive in the rich, moist soil of the cedar swamp. The cinnamon fern is the swamp's most common species. You can recognize it, by its circular cluster of fronds and cinnamon colored wooly stalk.

12) European Uses of Cedar Swamps

One of the reasons this environment is so rare is how colonists used the wood. As the European settlers came in, they started clearing the land for its wood and peat. The settlers prized the wood because it is light-weight, watertight, and decay-resistant. One use we still see today are the traditional cedar shingles that cover many houses on Cape Cod. Within a few generations of logging, they had cut even the smallest white cedar trees. Over time, seedlings became established. If left undisturbed by fire and logging, they grew into trees like the ones you see today.

13) Sweet Pepperbush

Called sweet pepperbush, this shrub blooms in late summer. It fills the woods with its fragrance, attracting bumblebees. The dried seed heads resemble peppercorns, giving it its name. Because this plant's natural habitat is near wetlands, we can use it as an indicator that we are in a wetland.



14) The Value of Wetlands

Today, wetlands only cover about 6 percent of the land in Massachusetts. They provide a home to plants and animals that would not be able to live anywhere else. Today, we recognize the value of wetlands for watershed protection and as a home for plants and animals.

This brings us to the end of the trail. Walk up the hill and straight through the field until you reach the dirt road. The middle road will take you back to Wallum Lake. We hope you enjoyed this self-guided tour. Please feel free to share it with your friends and families.

Welcome image by Bryant Stewart. Weekuw illustration courtesy Pearson Scott Foresman. Other illustrations courtesy the Biodiversity Heritage Library via Flickr - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/biodivlibrary/>

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DOUGLAS STATE FOREST

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