

East Head Reservoir Trail

Myles Standish State Forest



SELF-GUIDED INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

Welcome

Welcome to Myles Standish State Forest in Southeastern Massachusetts. This is a place born of fire and ice, shaped by the human hand. The area's landscape was formed over 10,000 years ago when the glaciers of our last ice age retreated, dropping their load of sand and stone. The sandy soil of these glacial deposits retains little rainwater and the vegetation is prone to forest fires during dry spells in the summer. The natural forest community that is found throughout much of the forest, the pitch pine/scrub oak association or "pine barrens," is uniquely adapted to these conditions and is found in only a few places in the world—including Myles Standish State Forest! As you hike this trail, keep in mind the complex history that has shaped this landscape and remember that, over time, it will continue to change.

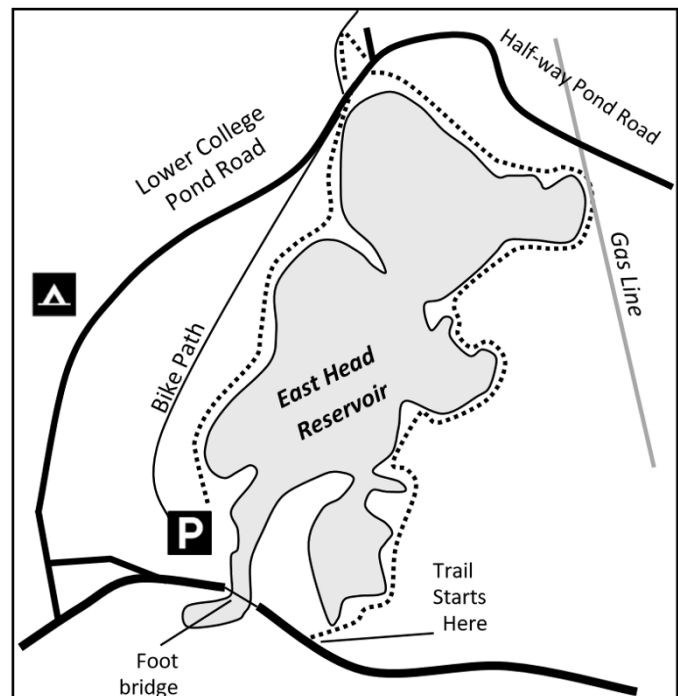
About the Trail

Interpretive stops are found on numbered posts along the East Head Reservoir Trail which correspond with this guide. Download or print a park trail map if you choose to hike any of the other park's trails at <https://www.mass.gov/locations/myles-standish-state-forest>.

This hiking trail is about 2.75 miles long and is mostly flat. Hiking time is usually between 60 and 90 minutes. Blue triangle markers guide your way. Enjoy yourself, but please remember...

- Observe all posted rules and regulations.
- Please stay on designated trails.
- Pets must be on leash at all times.
- Carry in, carry out all trash.
- Leave only footprints take only pictures.
- No motorized vehicles allowed on trails.

Begin at the Headquarters Parking Lot located at 194 Cranberry Road, South Carver. From the parking lot entrance, head left to cross a gated foot bridge. The East Head Reservoir Trail starts just after the second gate on your left-hand side.



*East Head Reservoir Trail begins across the foot bridge from the Headquarters parking lot. Total route length is **2.75 miles**. Hike is **easy** with little elevation change. Footing may be wet and uneven in places. There are a few boardwalks that may be slippery. Plan on **1 to 1.5 hours** hiking at a moderate pace.*

1) Connection to the Cranberry

Created in 1868, the waters of East Head Reservoir are not for drinking, but for use on nearby cranberry bogs. Cranberry bogs must be irrigated throughout the growing season. In early autumn, water released from this reservoir is used to flood the bogs for harvesting.

2) Biodiversity Abounds

The high-bush blueberries found along the shoreline produce delicious berries that ripen in late July and early August. These bushes provide both shelter and nourishment for a variety of songbirds. The catbird, commonly sighted along this trail, feeds on the blueberries. Look for a small gray bird with a long tail and listen for its cat-like call. These birds will often hide among thorny tangles of cat-briar vines, which can be found up ahead growing along the left side of the trail. Cat-briar has heart-shaped leaves on a thorny vine—be careful; they're sharp!

This shallow 86-acre reservoir is a perfect habitat for warm freshwater fish like yellow perch and pumpkinseed, a type of sunfish. The buzzing damselflies and dragonflies make for a tasty meal for other pond dwellers such as bullfrogs, snapping turtles, painted turtles, and the federally endangered northern red-bellied cooters. You may see turtles sunning themselves on fallen trees in the spring, summer, and early fall.

3) Water Loving Roots

Look for a tree that appears to be growing as a clump of four or more trunks. This is a red maple tree. It is sometimes called a swamp maple tree because it likes to grow in wet habitats. In this forest, red maple trees are mostly found on the edges of the ponds as the ponds provides the wet habitat they need. Why does it have so many trunks? Well, the original tree was cut down many years ago. New sprouts grew out from the stump and a few survived to become the multiple trunks we see today. Down the trail there is a red maple tree with eight trunks! Can you find it?

4) A Place Born of Fire

The road you just crossed is a fire road, designed to provide access to the huge brush breaker trucks used to fight forest fires. The Plymouth County area is prone to forest fires, due to its sandy soils that retain very little water. Many plants in Myles Standish State Forest have evolved to survive frequent forest fires. Look for a pine tree with thick, rough bark and pine needles that grow in bunches (called fascicles) of three needles. This is the pitch pine tree which has adapted to grow in sandy, nutrient-poor soil. Pitch pine trees have also adapted to help it survive a forest fire by producing cones that drop their seeds only after being heated by a fire (called serotinous cones), the ability to re-sprout from the roots after a fire, and the ability to grow new needles and branches directly from the main trunk (called epicormic branching).

5) Scrub Oak

This short oak species is found all around our state forest. These shrubs provide shelter and a supply of acorns for many forest animals. Often associated with the pitch pine, the scrub oak is also adapted to survive forest fires. They can live to be over 150 years old, even after repeated burning because their roots remain un-burnt after a fire and they can quickly regenerate.

6) The King's Pine

This huge white pine tree would have been a perfect specimen in colonial times to use as a ship's mast because it is tall, straight, flexible and resists sea worm. A 1688 English decree from the King

ordered that all suitable pines of 24 inches or more in diameter be stamped with a broad arrow and designated solely for use by the Royal Navy as ship masts. Mast Road, bordering the state forest, got its name as a route for transporting mast trees to the coast.

7) Through the Bog

Several interesting plants occupy this bog area. Swamp azalea, with its sweet smelling white flowers of June and July, is prevalent. Pink-blossomed water willow shoots are numerous throughout the bog. White fringed orchis can also be located along sections of the boardwalk. You may also find the sundew, a small insectivorous plant. The sundew grows very low to the ground (often on sphagnum moss) and has leaves with many tiny red spikes on them. Look for the sundew along the boardwalk and see if you can find any small insects trapped in their sticky spikes.

8) Princess Pine

Look at the ground around trail marker #8 to see this club moss. It looks like a miniature version of a pine tree. It is sometimes called Lycopodium (its Genus) or Princess Pine. Neither a pine nor a true moss, these plants are more closely related to ferns. It is called a seedless plant as it produces spores, not seeds. In the 1800s, Lycopodium spores were used as flash powder that was ignited above the cameras of the time to provide a flash exposure for early photography. This unusual plant is just one example of the unique life that our forest is helping to preserve.

9) Sailors' Delight

If you are walking this trail in late July through mid-August, you may smell the perfumed scent of the sweet pepperbush flowers. This attractive member of the white alder family carries dense, slender spikes of white flowers that exude a perfumed fragrance. Sweet pepperbush gets its name from its sweet scent and its dried seedpods, which resemble peppercorns. So fragrant is this sweet-scented eastern native shrub that it was also called "Sailor's Delight" by those who could smell it far out to sea! As you continue down the trail you will come to a crosswalk across Lower College Pond Rd. The trail continues into the forest on the other side of the road. This road is used by many vehicles all year long; please cross carefully.

10) Witch's Broom

If you look up at the branches of the pitch pine in this area you will notice several dense clusters of pine needles on the branches. They look like nests but actually are made by genetic mutations in the trees. They are often called witches' brooms. In the middle ages, Europeans thought they were the homes of witches, hobgoblins and elves and they stayed well away from them. As you follow the trail notice a number of other pitch pines have witches brooms. This means they share a common ancestor who passed on this mutation! Note: You will cross back over Lower College Pond Rd at the crosswalk and the hiking trail continues to the left of the paved bike path. This road is used by many vehicles all year long; please cross carefully.

11) CCC: A Lasting Legacy

In 1933, in the height of the Great Depression, one of newly inaugurated President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first New Deal initiatives was the establishment of the Emergency Conservation Work Act (ECW), popularly known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). This federal economic relief and conservation program provided jobs for unemployed young men and veterans to support their families, while at the same time focused on improving the nation's open space and recreational resources. The forest was mostly cleared over 200 years ago - the wood used to fuel furnaces for smelting bog iron. From 1933 into the 1940's, the Civilian Conservation Corps created extensive white pine plantations, such as the one to the right of the path. The CCC program in Massachusetts was concerned with improvement and development of state park resources. The CCC left a lasting legacy of forest improvements and recreational resources throughout Myles Standish State Forest, the state of Massachusetts, and across the nation; many are still evident today.

12) Reaching for the Sun

This gray birch tree with its grayish white bark and pointed triangular leaves grows best in open, sunny areas. That is why we find it growing near the water's edge. Its roots help to protect the shoreline against erosion. The gray birch tree is small-growing and short-lived. It is a common pioneer species, meaning it will often be one of the first trees to grow on disturbed land. Its seeds and buds are eaten by ruffed grouse and deer browse on its twigs. Like most deciduous trees in this forest they are most commonly found near our ponds where the soil is comparatively richer and more fertile than the sandy pine barrens areas away from the ponds.

13) Don't Forget to Reach Up!

When you're hiking, it's easy to get lost in your own thoughts and, of course, we should always look where we are going in the woods, but don't forget there is a whole world above you! Birds like the eastern towhee and the pretty yellow pine warbler make their nests in the canopy of the white pines. The dead tree trunk across the trail might make a nice den for a gray fox one day. They are the only canine that sometimes make their dens in trees. And at night, great horned owls, barred owls, and screech owls perch in the branches waiting to swoop down on their prey.

14) Life at the Water's Edge

A number of wildflowers decorate the shoreline of this sandy-bottomed inlet. Blue flag iris is an early summer addition, followed by the pink-blossomed water willow. During high-water years, look for yellow swamp loosestrife and rosy swamp milkweed. The tall broad-leafed cattails produce flowers in the form of fuzzy spikes. Cattails are an important wildlife plant. Muskrats feed on the young shoots and the starchy roots, while birds use the fluffy flower material for building nests. You may notice some tall plants with purple flowers arranged in a spike. This is purple loosestrife, an invasive wildflower that thrives in wetlands. Unfortunately, this plant has few to no natural enemies and is crowding out our native wetland species such as cattail.

This brings us to the end of the trail at the rear of the Headquarters parking lot. We hope you enjoyed this self-guided tour.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) oversees over 450,000 acres of state parks, forests, beaches, bike trails, parkways, watershed lands, and dams across the Commonwealth. DCR's mission is to: *Protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources for the well-being of all.*

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UPDATED 06/2020