

Habitat Hike

Erving State Forest

SELF-GUIDED INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

Welcome

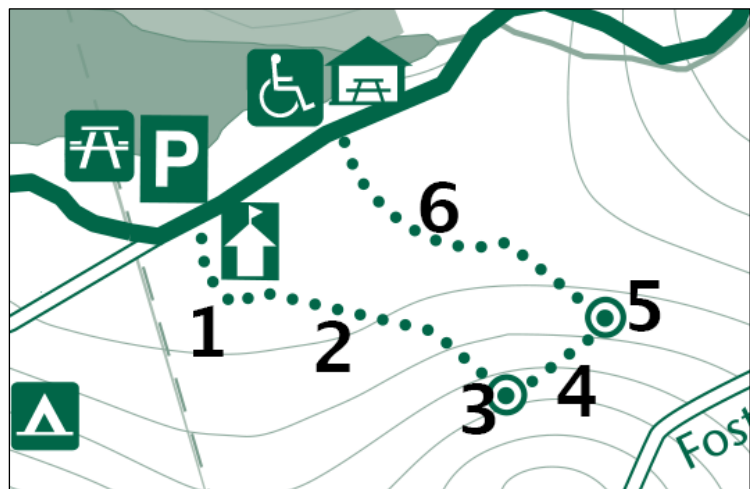
Welcome to the Laurel Loop Trail! As you explore the trail, this guide invites you to take a closer look at *habitats* along the way. Habitats are the natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism. This is where they have the items that they need to live, such as shelter, food, water, and sunlight. Geology—or soils and rocks play a big part in shaping habitats.

We can think of habitats as neighborhoods and compare plants and animals with humans. Some need lots of space, others need very little. Some do best near water or in the woods. Others prefer dry, sunny spaces. Humans can live almost everywhere by creating what they need, but plants and animals cannot. Some plants and animals can live in many places while others need a specific habit.

The Laurel Loop trail covers a small area, yet a wide assortment of plants and animals call it home. This guide describes a few of Laurel Loop’s “neighborhoods” and the “locals” that live there.

About the Trail

The Laurel Loop Trail offers the park’s most prominent view of Mount Monadnock. This **1-mile** loop trail is relatively easy for hiking. The trailhead is located to the right of the contact station on Laurel Lake Road and ends about 200 yards down the road. Plan on spending about **45-60 minutes** when hiking at a moderate pace. The trail is not stroller friendly.



Follow the trail blazes and pathways.

- **For foot traffic only.**
- Please stay on the designated trail.
- Leave only footprints, take only pictures.

1) Stream Bed Residence



The stream bed before the bridge is a perfect place to find red-spotted newts. Newts are a specific type of salamander. For most of their life, they have green bodies with red spots and live in streams and ponds. They hunt little aquatic critters and find shelter among living and dead plants.

Red-spotted newts move to land during their juvenile or “teenage” years. At this stage, their name becomes *red eft*, and their color changes to flashy orange. When it is humid or after it rains, conditions are perfect for them to move about. The moisture keeps them from sticking to the ground. They need this damp habitat to keep from drying out. As a reminder, if you do see them, leave them be, and do not pick them up – you would not want a giant grabbing you!

This stream-side area is a habitat for more than newts. Look and listen for clues that something else has been in the neighborhood.

2) Mountain Laurel Lane

The trail gets its name from the mountain laurel that is common along the way.

No matter the season, this shrub stands out. Its thick, glossy, oval leaves stay green all year. Feel the twisty, gnarled woody stems and shreddy bark. Mountain laurel is most spectacular in mid-June when the flower buds explode into white and pink petals. Their star shape looks like intricate origami folds.

Mountain Laurel lives in acidic, rocky soil and does not need direct sunlight to survive. This shade tolerance lets it live underneath the surrounding trees. It’s a perfect balance for laurel to grow and enrich the neighborhood.

Mountain Laurel creates habitat for others. The eye-catching blooms are plentiful in spring, and their pollen attracts bees, wasps, and butterflies. Some birds, such as Warblers and Robins, nest in its branches. Laurel thickets make good hiding places for other animals. When winter food is scarce, deer eat the leaves. Look for jagged or torn leaves as evidence of a deer munching on them.

Help us protect these beautiful plants and leave them to grow. Let them provide for all the neighborhood’s creatures.



3) Crystal Community

With not a lot of plants giving larger animals a place to hide, this area is too exposed for them to live here.

This area is a perfect place for creatures such as insects. Galls (see the image to the right) from the oak trees in the area provide a home within a home here. The larva of the wasp lives in the gall until it metamorphoses into an adult.



Look at the rocks and you will see a transparent mineral called quartz which this area is named after. Quartz comes in many shades, but the quartz here is transparent. This mineral does not wear away easily.

4) Cliff Top Heights

The trail passes along a cliff on your right. Use care and stay away from the edge.

Time and weather change the landscape, just as they change the homes we live in. New England's rocky cliffs, rich valley soils, sand plains, rivers, and ponds are habitat for its many life forms. Look out at mountains and valleys in the distance and imagine all the different habitats it contains.

5) Mount Monadnock Vista Village



The most impressive part of this habitat is the view. Mount Monadnock, located in New Hampshire, is clearly visible in the distance. You can often see deer (left, about 2-3 inches long) or moose (right, about 5-7 inches long) tracks and scat here, so keep watch for traces of them.

The surrounding landscape provides good cover and plenty of food. Keep your eyes open and you might also see signs of squirrels, bobcats, foxes, and coyote. If you are lucky enough to see one of these animals, remember to admire them from a distance and share any pictures with us on Instagram @MassDCR.

6) Lichen Rock-sbury

As you continue your trek, be on the lookout for a large boulder on the left, nestled within some laurel, and covered in a pale green, leafy-looking growth. The boulder is sometimes called "Harry Rock." The growth on it is lichen, specifically, Rock Tripe lichen. Lichen is a special organism; a union between fungus and algae. Some of the lichen growing on this rock could be over 100 years old!

Lichens reveal the health of the forest. Since they can't survive in polluted air, they tell us that this habitat is flourishing.

Continue the rest of the path as it brings you to the end of the trail just before the parking lot.

We hope you enjoyed exploring the Laurel Loop Trail at Erving State Forest. You've taken the time to look closer to find the range of habitats that can exist throughout a short trail. As you hike here and elsewhere, watch to see how each living thing finds a home in the environment around them.

Red-spotted newt photograph by Patrick Coin. Oak Gall photograph by Nick Wisniewski, Mountain Laurel illustration courtesy the Biodiversity Heritage Library via Flickr - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/biodivlibrary>. Moose and Deer footprints courtesy MassWildlife.

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ERVING STATE FOREST

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